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FANTASY BOOK

VOL. 1

NUMBER 6

GARRET FORD, Editor

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Published by FANTASY PUBLISHING CO., Inc., 8318-20 Avalon Blvd.,
Los Angeles 3, Calif. Subscription price (Regular edition): ~~\$2.50~~—
Deluxe edition: \$3.00—for 12 issues,

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Printed in the U. S. A.

The Little Man on the Subway

BY ISAAC ASIMOV & JAMES MACCREIGH

AFTER ALL, subway stations, as Colonel Stoopnagle would say, are places where people get out at, so when no one left the first car at Atlantic Avenue station, Conductor Cullen of the I. R. T. began to get worried. In fact, no one had left the first car from the time the run to Flatbush had begun—though dozens were getting on all the time.

Odd! Very odd! It was the kind of proposition that made well-bred conductors remove their caps and scratch their heads. Conductor Cullen did so. It didn't help, but he repeated the process at Bergen Street, the next station, where again the first car lost not one of its population. And at Grand Army Plaza, he added to the head-scratching process a few rare old Gaelic words that had passed down from father to son for hundreds of years. They ionized the surrounding atmosphere, but otherwise did not affect the situation.

At Eastern Parkway, Cullen tried an experiment. He carefully refrained from opening the first car's doors at all. He leaned forward eagerly, twisted his head and watched—and was treated to nothing short of a miracle. The New York subway rider is neither shy, meek, nor

modest and doors that do not open immediately or sooner are helped on their way by sundry kicks. But this time there was not a kick, not a shriek, not even a modified yell. Cullen's eyes popped.

He was getting angry. At Franklin Avenue, where he again contacted the Express, he flung open the doors and swore at the crowd. Every door spouted commuters of both sexes and all ages, except that terrible first car. At those doors, three men and a very young girl got on, though Cullen could plainly see the slight bulging of the walls that the already super-crowded condition of the car had caused.

For the rest of the trip to Flatbush Avenue, Cullen ignored the first car completely, concentrating on that last stop where everyone would *have* to get off. Everyone! President, Church, and Beverly Road were visited and passed, and Cullen found himself counting the stations to the Flatbush terminus.

They seemed like such a nice bunch of passengers, too. They read their newspapers, stared into the whirling blackness out the window, or at the girl's legs across the way, or at nothing at all, quite like ordinary people. Only they didn't want to get out. They didn't even want to get into the next car where empty seats filled the place. Imagine New Yorkers resisting the impulse to pass from one car to the other, and missing the chance to leave the doors open for the benefit of the draft.

But it was Flatbush Avenue! Cullen rubbed his hands, slammed the doors open and yelled in his best unintelligible manner, "Lasstop!" He repeated it two or three times hoarsely and several in that damned first car looked up at him. There was reproach in their eyes. Have you never heard of the Mayor's anti-noise campaign, they seemed to say.

The last other passenger had come out of the train, and the scattered new ones were coming in. There were a few curious looks at the jammed car, but not too many. The New Yorker considers everything he cannot understand a publicity stunt.

Cullen fell back on his Gaelic once more and dashed up the platform toward the motorman's booth. He needed moral assistance. The motorman should have been out of his cab, preparing for his next trip, but he wasn't. Cullen could see him through the glass of the door, leaning on the controls and staring vacantly at the bumper-stop ahead.

"Gus!" cried Cullen. "Come out! There's a hell of—"

At that point, his tongue skidded to a halt, because it wasn't Gus. It was a little old man, who smiled politely and twiddled his fingers in greeting.

Patrick Cullen's Irish soul rebelled. With a yelp, he grabbed the edge of the door and tried to shove it open. He should have known that wouldn't work. So, taking a deep breath and commending said Irish soul to God, he made for the open door and ploughed into the mass of haunted humans in that first car. Momentum carried him six feet, and then there he stuck. Behind him, those he had knocked down picked themselves up from the laps of their fellow-travelers, apologized with true New York courtesy (consisting of a growl, a grunt, and a grimace) and returned to their papers.

Then, caught helplessly, he heard the Dispatcher's bell. It was time for his own train to be on its way. Duty called! With a superhuman effort, he inched towards the door, but it closed before he could get there, and the train commenced to move.

It occurred to Cullen that he had missed a report for the first time, and he said "Damn!" After the train had

travelled some fifty feet, it came to him that they were going the wrong way, and this time he said nothing.

After all, what was there to say—even in the purest of Gaelic.

How *could* a train go the wrong way at Flatbush Ave. There were no further tracks. There was no further tunnel. There was a bumper-stop to prevent eccentric motormen from trying to bore one. It was absurd. Even the New Deal couldn't have done it.

But there they were!

There were stations in this new tunnel, too,—cute little small ones just large enough for one car. But that was all right, because only one car was travelling. The rest had somehow become detached, presumably to make the routine trip to Bronx Park.

There were maybe a dozen stations on the line—with curious names. Cullen noticed only a few, because he found it difficult to keep his eyes from going out of focus. One was Archangel Boulevard; another Seraph Road; still another Cherub Plaza.

And then, the train slid into a monster station, that looked uncommonly like a cave and stopped. It was huge, about three hundred feet deep, and almost spherical. The tracks ran to the exact center, without trusses, and the platform at its side likewise rested comfortably upon air.

The conductor was the only person left in the car, the rest having mostly gotten off at Hosannah Square. He hung limply from the porcelain hand-grip, staring fixedly at a lip-stick advertisement. The door of the motorman's cabin opened and the little man came out. He glanced at Cullen, turned away, then whirled back.

"Hey," he said, "who are you?"

Cullen rotated slowly, still clutching the hand-grip.

"Only the conductor. Don't mind me. I'm quitting anyway. I don't like the work."

"Oh, dear, dear, this is unexpected." The little man waggled his head and tch-tched. "I'm Mr. Crumley," he explained. "I steal things. People mostly. Sometimes subway cars,—but they're such big, clumsy things, don't you think?"

"Mister," groaned Cullen. "I quit thinking two hours ago. It didn't get me anywhere. Who are you, anyway?"

"I told you—I'm Mr. Crumley. I'm practicing to be a god."

"A gob?" said Cullen. "You mean a sailor?"

"Dear, no," frowned Mr. Crumley. "I said, 'god', as in Jehovah. Look!" He pointed out the window to the wall of the cave. Where his finger pointed the rock billowed and rose. He moved his finger and there was a neat ridge of rock describing a reversed, lower case "h".

"That's my symbol," said Crumley modestly. "Mystic, isn't it? But that's nothing. Wait till I really get things organized. Dear, dear, will I give them miracles."

Cullen's head swivelled between the raised-rock symbol and the simpering Mr. Crumley, until he began to get dizzy and then he stopped.

"Listen," he demanded hoarsely. "How did you get that car out of Flatbush Avenue. Where did that tunnel come from? Are some of them foreigners—"

"Oh, my, no!" answered Mr. Crumley. "I made that myself and willed it so that no one would notice. It was quite difficult. It just wears the ectoplasm right out of me. Miracles with people mixed up in it are much harder than the other kind, because you have to fight their wills. Unless you have lots of Believers, you can't do it. Now that I've got over a hundred thousand, I can do it, but there was a time," he shook his head reminiscently, "when

I couldn't even have levitated a baby—or healed a leper. Oh well, we're wasting time. We ought to be at the nearest factory."

Cullen brightened. 'Factory' was more prosaic. "I once had a brother," he said, "who worked in a sweater factory, but—"

"Oh, goodness, Mr. Cullen. I'm referring to my Believers' Factories. I have to educate people to believe in me, don't I, and preaching is such slow work. I believe in mass production. Some day I intend to be called the Henry Ford of Utopia. Why, I've got twelve Factories in Brooklyn alone and when I manufacture enough Believers, I'll just cover the world with them."

He sighed, "Gracious me, if I only had enough Believers. I've got to have a million before I can let things progress by themselves and until then I have to attend to every little detail myself. It is so boring! I even have to keep reminding my Believers who I am—even the Disciples. Incidentally, Cullen,—I read your mind, by the way, so that's how I know your name—you want to be a Believer, of course."

"Well, now," said Cullen nervously.

"Oh, come now. *Some* gods would have been angry at your intrusion and done away with you," he snapped his fingers, "like that. Not I, though, because I think killing people is messy and inconsiderate. Just the same, you'll have to be a Believer."

Now Patrick Cullen was an intelligent Irishman. That is to say, he admitted the existence of banshees, leprechauns, and the Little Folk, and kept an open mind on poltergeists, werewolves, vampires and such-like foreign trash. At mere supernaturalities, he was too well-educated to sneer. Still, Cullen did not intend to compromise his religion. His theology was weak, but for a mortal

to claim godship smacked of heresy, not to say sacrilege and blasphemy, even to him.

"You're a faker," he cried boldly, "and you're headed straight for Hell the way you're going."

Mr. Crumley clicked his tongue, "What terrible language you use. And so unnecessary! Of course you Believe in me."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Well, then, if you are stubborn, I'll pass a minor miracle. It's inconvenient but now," he made vague motions with his left hand, "you Believe in me."

"Certainly," said Cullen, hurt. "I always did. How do I go about worshipping you. I want to do this properly."

"Just Believe in me, and that's enough. Now you must go to the factories and then we'll send you back home—they'll never know you were gone—and you can live your life like a Believer."

The conductor smiled ecstatically, "Oh, happy life! I *want* to go to the factories."

"Of course you would," replied Mr. Crumley. "You'd be a fine Crumleyite otherwise, wouldn't you? Come!" He pointed at the door of the car, and the door slid open. They walked out and Crumley kept on pointing. Rock faded away in front, and bit down again behind. Through the wall Cullen walked, following that little figure who was his god.

That *was* a god, thought Cullen. Any god that could do that was one hell of a damn good god to believe in.

And then he was at the factory—in another cave, only smaller. Mr. Crumley seemed to like caves.

Cullen didn't pay much attention to his surroundings. He couldn't see much anyway on account of the faint violet mist that blurred his vision. He got the impression

of a slowly-moving conveyor belt, with men stationed at intervals along it. Disciples, he thought. And the parts being machined on that belt were probably non-Believers, or such low trash.

There was a man watching him, smiling. A Disciple, Cullen thought, and quite naturally made the sign to him. He had never made it before, but it was easy. The Disciple replied in kind.

"He told me you were coming," said the Disciple. "He made a special miracle for you, he said. That's quite a distinction. Do you want me to show you around the belt?"

"You bet."

"Well, this is Factory One. It's the nerve center of all the factories of the country. The others give preliminary treatment only; and make only Believers. *We* make Disciples."

Oh, boy, Disciples! "Am I going to be a Disciple?" asked Cullen eagerly.

"After being miraculated by *him*. Of course! You're a *somebody*, you know. There are only five other people he ever took personal charge of."

This was a glorious way to do things. Everything Mr. Crumley did was glorious. What a god! What a god!

"You started that way, too."

"Certainly," said the Disciple, placidly, "I'm an important fellow, too. Only I wish I were more important, even."

"What for?" said Cullen, in a shocked tone of voice. "Are you murmuring against the dictates of Mr. Crumley? (may he prosper). This is sacrilege."

The Disciple shifted uncomfortably, "Well, I've got ideas, and I'd like to try them out."

"You've got ideas, huh?" muttered Cullen balefully.

"Does Mr. Crumley (may he live forever) know?"

"Well,—frankly, no! But just the same," the Disciple looked over each shoulder carefully and drew closer, "I'm not the only one. There are lots of us that think Mr. Crumley (on whom be blessings) is just a trifle old-fashioned. For instance, take the lights in this place."

Cullen stared upwards. The lights were the same type as those in the terminal-cave. They might have been stolen from any line of the IRT subway. Perfect copies of the stop-and-go signals and the exit markers.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

The Disciple sneered, "They lack originality. You'd think a grade A god would do something new. When he takes people, he does it through the subway, and he obeys subway rules. He waits for the Dispatcher to tell him to go; he stops at every station; he uses crude electricity and so on. What we need," the Disciple was waving his hands wildly and shouting, "is more enterprise, more git-and-go. We've got to speed up things and run them with efficiency and vim."

Cullen stared hotly, "You are a heretic," he accused. "You are doomed to damnation." He looked angrily about for a bell, whistle, gong, or drum wherewith to summon the great Crumley, but found nothing.

The other blinked in quick thought. "Say," he said, bluffly, "look at what time it is. I'm behind schedule. You better get on the belt for your first treatment."

Cullen was hot about the slovenly assistance Mr. Crumley was getting from this inferior Disciple, but a treatment is a treatment, so making the sign devoutly, he got on. He found it fairly comfortable despite its jerky motion. The Disciple motioned to Cullen's first preceptor—another Disciple—standing beside a sort of blackboard. Cullen had watched others while discussing Crumley and he had

noticed the question and answer procedure that had taken place. He had noticed it particularly.

Consequently, he was surprised, when the second Disciple, instead of using his heavy pointer to indicate a question on the board, reversed it and brought it down upon his head.

The lights went out!

When he came to, he was under the belt, at the very bottom of the cave. He was tied up, and the Rebellious Disciple and three others were talking about him.

"He couldn't be persuaded," the Disciple was saying. "Crumley must have given him a double treatment or something."

"It's the last double treatment Crumley'll ever give," said the fat little man.

"Let's hope so. How's it coming?"

"Very well. Very well, indeed. We teleported ourselves to Section Four about two hours ago. It was a perfect miracle."

The Disciple was pleased. "Fine! How're they doing at Four?"

The fat little man clucked his lips. "Well, now, not so hot. For some reason they're getting odd effects over there. Miracles are just happening. Even ordinary Crumleyites can pass them, and sometimes they—just happen. It's extremely annoying."

"Hmm, that's bad. If there are too many hitches Crumley'll get suspicious. If he investigates there first, he can reconvert all of them in a jiffy, before he comes here and then without their support we might not be strong enough to stand up against him."

"Say, now," said the fat man apprehensively, "we're not strong enough *now*, you know. None of this going

off half-cocked."

"We're strong enough," pointed out the Disciple stiffly, "to weaken him long enough to get us a new god started, and after that—"

"A new god, eh?" said another. He nodded wisely.

"Sure," said the Disciple. "A new god, created by us, can be destroyed by us. He'd be completely under our thumb and then instead of this one-man tyranny, we can have a sort of—er—council."

There were general grins and everyone looked pleased.

"But we'll discuss that further some other time," continued the Disciple briskly. "Let's Believe just a bit. Crumley isn't stupid, you know, and we don't want him to observe any slackening. Come on, now. All together."

They closed their eyes, concentrated a bit, and then opened them with a sigh.

"Well," said the little, fat man, "*that's* over. I'd better be getting back now."

From under the belt, Cullen watched him. He looked singularly like a chicken about to take off for a tree as he flexed his knees and stared upwards. Then he added to the resemblance not a little when he spread his arms, gave a little hop and fluttered away.

Cullen could follow his flight only by watching the eyes of the three remaining. Those eyes turned up and up, following the fat man to the very top of the cave, it seemed. There was an air of self-satisfaction about those eyes. They were very happy over their miracles.

Then they all went away and left Cullen to his holy indignation. He was shocked to the very core of his being at this sinful rebellion, this apostasy—this—this—. There weren't any words for it, even when he tried Gaelic.

Imagine trying to create a god that would be under the thumbs of the creators. It was anthropomorphic heresy

(where had he heard that word now?) and struck at the roots of all religion. Was he going to lie there and watch anything strike at the roots of all religion? Was he going to submit to having Mr. Crumley (may he swim through seas of ecstasy) deposed?

Never!

But the ropes thought otherwise, so there he stayed.

And then there was an interruption in his thoughts. There came a low, booming sound,—a sound which would have been a voice if it had not been pitched so incredibly low. There was a menace to it that got immediate attention. It got attention from Cullen who quivered in his bonds; from the others in the cave, who quivered even harder, not being restrained by ropes; from the belt itself, which stopped dead with a jerk, and quivered mightily.

The Rebellious Disciple dropped on his knees and quivered more than any of them.

The voice came again, this time in a recognizable language, "WHERE IS THAT BUM, CRUMLEY?" it roared.

There was no wait for an answer. A cloud of shadow gathered in the center of the hall and spat a black bolt at the belt. A spot of fire leaped out from where the bolt had touched and spread slowly outward. Where it passed, the belt ceased to exist. It was far from Cullen, but there were humans nearer, and among those scurrying pandemonium existed.

Cullen wanted very much to join the flight, but unfortunately the Disciple who had trussed him up had evidently been a Boy Scout. Jerking, twisting, and writhing had no effect upon the stubborn ropes, so he fell back upon Gaelic and wishing. He wished he were free. He wished he weren't tied. He wished he were far away from that

devouring flame. He wished lots of things, some unprintable, but mainly those.

And with that he felt a gentle slipping pressure and down at his feet was an untidy pile of hempen fibre. Evidently the forces liberated by the rebellion were getting out of control here as well as in Section Four. What had the little fat man said? "Miracles are just happening. Even ordinary Crumleyites can pass them, and sometimes they—just happen."

But why waste time? He ran to the rock wall and howled a wish at it to dissolve into nothing. He howled several times, with Gaelic modifications, but the wall didn't even slightly soften. He stared round wildly and then saw the hole. It was on the side of the cave, diametrically across from Cullen's position at the bottom of the hall, and about three loops of the belt up. The upward spiral passed just below it.

Somehow he made the leap that grabbed the lower lip of the spiral, wriggled his way onto it and jumped into a run. The fire of disintegration was behind him and plenty far away, but it was making time. Up the belt to the third loop he ran, not taking time to be dizzy from the circular trip. But when he got there, the hole, large, black and inviting was just the tiniest bit higher than he could jump.

He leaned against the wall panting. The spot of fire was now two spots, crawling both ways from a twenty foot break in the belt. Everyone in the cavern, some two hundred people, was in motion, and everyone made some sort of noise.

Somehow, the sight stimulated him. It nerved him to further efforts to get into the hole. Wildly, he tried walking up the sheer wall, but this didn't work.

And then Mr. Crumley stuck his head out of the hole

and said, "Oh, mercy me, what a perfectly terrible mess. Dear, dear! Come up here, Cullen! Why do you stay down there!"

A great peace descended upon Cullen. "Hail Mr. Crumley," he cried. "May you sniff the essence of roses forever."

Mr. Crumley looked pleased, "Thank you, Cullen." He waved his hand, and the conductor was beside him—a simple matter of levitation. Once again, Cullen decided in his inmost soul that here was a *god*.

"And now," said Mr. Crumley, "we must hurry, hurry, hurry. I've lost most of my power when the Disciples rebelled, and my subway car is stuck half-way. I'll need your help. Hurry!"

Cullen had no time to admire the tiny subway at the end of the tunnel. He jumped off the platform on Crumley's heels and dashed about a hundred feet down the tube to where the car was standing idle. He wafted into the open front door with the grace of a chorus-boy. Mr. Crumley took care of that.

"Cullen," said Mr. Crumley, "start this thing and take it back to the regular line. And be careful; *he* is waiting for me."

"Who?"

"He, the new god. Imagine those fools—no, idiots—thinking they could create a controllable god, when the very essence of godship is uncontrollability. Of course, when they made a god to destroy me, they made a Destroyer, and he'll just destroy everything in sight that I created, including my Disciples."

Cullen worked quickly. He knew how to start car 30990; any conductor would. He raced to the other end of the car for the control lever, snatched it off, and returned at top speed. That was all he needed. There was

power in the rail; the lights were on; and there were no stop signals between him and God's Country.

Mr. Crumley lay himself down on a seat, "Be very quiet. *He* may let you get past him. I'm going to blank myself out, and maybe he won't notice me. At any rate, he won't harm you,—I *hope*. Dear, dear, since this all started in Section Four, things are *such* a mess."

Eight stations passed before anything happened and then came Utopia Circle station and—well, nothing really *happened*. It was just an impression—an impression of people all around him for a few seconds watching him closely with a virulent hostility. It wasn't exactly people, but a person. It wasn't exactly a person either, but just a huge eye, watching—watching—watching.

But it passed, and almost immediately Cullens saw a black and white "Flatbush Avenue" sign at the side of the tunnel. He jammed on his brakes in a hurry, for there was a train waiting there. But the controls didn't work the way they should have, and the car edged up until it was in contact with the cars before. With a soft click, it coupled, and 30990 was just the last car of the train.

It was Mr. Crumley's work, of course. Mr. Crumley stood behind him, watching. "He didn't get you, did he? No—I see he didn't."

"Is there any more danger?" asked Cullen, anxiously.

"I don't think so," responded Mr. Crumley sadly. "After he has destroyed all my creation, there will be nothing left for him to destroy, and, deprived of a function, he will simply cease to exist. That's the result of this nasty, slipshod work. I'm disgusted with human beings."

"Don't say that," said Cullen.

"I will," reported Mr. Crumley savagely, "Human

beings aren't fit to be god of. They're too much trouble and worry. It would give any self-respecting god grey-hairs and I suppose you think a god looks very dignified all grey. Darn all humans! They can get along without me. From now on, I'm going to go to Africa and try the chimpanzees. I'll bet they make *much* better material"

"But wait," wailed Cullen. "What about me? I *believe* in you."

"Oh, dear, that would never do. Here! Return to normal."

Mr. Crumley's hand caressed the air, and Cullen, once more a God-fearing Irishman let loose a roar in the purest Gaelic and made for him.

"Why, you blaspheming spalpeen—"

But there was no Mr. Crumley. There was only the Dispatcher, asking very impolitely,—in English—what the blankety-blank hell was the matter with him.

IN THE NEXT NUMBER

Journey to Barkut. The dean of American science-fiction writers, Murray Leinster, has here created the charming and mythical kingdom of Barkut—an elusive elfin world of **Ifrits** and **Djinns**—a world from the **Arabian Nights!** Part one.

Kleon of the Golden Sun This absorbing story of a menace from the stars contains some of Ed Earl Repp's best writing.

AND OTHER FIRST-CLASS IMAGINATIVE FICTION



SONGS of the SPACEWAYS

POETRY EDITOR: LILITH LORRAINE, ROGERS, ARK.

CHIEF ENGINEER

Some day we who huddle in our
gadget-haunted hogans
at sub-zero temperatures
wishing for a comfortable leopard skin
to allay the fuel shortage
will presently -
snap on the light switch
and no light will come
will presently exhaust the last pint of gas
on a rutted highway
and leave the car there
in a vast steel graveyard
as a final monument
to free enterprise.

Someday our planes will fall from the heavens
like wounded birds
stretching their bat-winged skeletons
knee-deep in atom dust.
Yes, we shall presently
snap on a light-switch
and there will be no light.
Somebody - Somewhere
has turned off the Master-Switch.

Lucrezia Reynard

THE UNIVERSE RANGER

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

MY friend John Willis Spruce was the most imperturable man I had ever met. Nothing seemed to ruffle him: when he lost all his money in a stock crash, he merely shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and said, "Well, what of it?" And when his wife left him, his only son went bad, and his daughter ran away with a good-for-nothing actor, he still looked as tranquil as if the whole world were the proverbial bed of roses. Even the convulsions of the nations were as nothing to him; he is the only person I know of who did not seem perturbed at Pearl Harbor, nor agitated at the atomic bomb nor at the failure of the United Nations. "Seen against the perspective of the universe," he flung at me laughingly, while screwing up the preternaturally large owlsh eyes that stared beneath the great dome of his wrinkled forehead, "these things are less than pinpricks on an elephant's skin."

There was a mystery about John Willis Spruce. Although he passed his working days visibly enough as Associate Professor of Physics at the Harley Institute of Technology, nobody seemed to know what happened to him on weekends or during the long summer vacations. He simply vanished from sight, and did not turn up again

until the moment when he was wanted in the laboratory or lecture hall. Even I, a fellow professor to whom he was as friendly as to any human being, had no idea where he went. Several times, when I chaffed him on his disappearances and suggested that he spent the intervals with some fair charmer, he stared at me with that wondering look which one will give to a display of supreme imbecility, raked his bald head with a calloused, stumpy hand, and remarked with a faint amusement, "Some day, Clifton, you will see—you will see." It did not, of course, then occur to me to connect his periodic disappearances with his almost unhuman calm and aloofness.

I did not even see any relationship between the two on the day when he came to me, somewhat thoughtfully stroked the ragged moustache which overlooked his thin lips, and declared, "Clifton, my heart hasn't been behaving any too well of late, so I'd better let you in on a secret—just in case. Naturally, I know that it doesn't matter one whit from the cosmic point of view, but I have a treasure that I would not like to see die with me—the most extraordinary treasure, I think, ever given to mankind. Not wishing to face the silly crowds of curiosity seekers, I haven't yet said a word about it to any soul. But the cream of thirty years of research has gone into it. It has only recently been perfected."

"*What* has been perfected?" I demanded, wondering if my friend's head were not slightly touched.

"Come with me, and you'll see something you'll not soon forget."

He then got into my car—he had never troubled to procure one of his own—and directed me to drive him to a distant part of the city. We stopped before a huge dilapidated barn of a house in the outskirts; and taking out a key, he plunged toward a basement door with the closest

approach to eagerness I had ever observed on his usually immobile countenance. "Here's where I've been enjoying my weekends and vacations for many years," he informed me.

"The devil you have!" I muttered, as he shot ahead of me down a dark passageway, then around a turn so dim that I stumbled and lost my footing.

Recovering myself with a curse, I heard the snapping of a switch; then blinked, and stared about me in startled bewilderment. Suddenly I seemed transported to some fantastic fairyland. For an instant I was aware only of a blaze of light, which flung itself at my eyes with a thousand sword-thrusts; then, as I began to adapt myself to the intense illumination, I stared into a wilderness of mirrors, prisms and lenses: concave mirrors and convex, mirrors spear-shaped and scimitar-curved, and pinnate like the leaves of certain ferns; prisms of all odd shapes and sizes, arranged so as to break the reflections from the mirrors; and lenses fitted to tubes with eyepieces and tubes without eyepieces, all of them connected with an intricacy of wires. Above me a battery of fluorescent lights accounted for the brilliance that assailed my eyes.

"What under thunder!" was all I could exclaim, in my wonder and amazement.

"Don't be surprised, Clifton," came Spruce's voice, smoothing, mellow and unexciting. "You see here my universe ranger. The fruit of years of secret study."

"Universe ranger? What in blazes is a universe ranger?"

"If you will seat yourself over there, Clifton, I will try to explain."

For the first time, I saw a small chair placed before the eyepiece of a little tube like a field telescope, except that it

was directed toward some of the mirrors rather than at open space.

Dutifully I took the indicated seat, while my friend rambled on, "First I will introduce you to the infra-phase of the investigations."

"Infra-phase?"

"Yes, there are both an infra and a super-phase. Now if you will keep your gaze fastened on that eyepiece, we will begin."

I tried my best to follow directions, but it was hard to concentrate as the snapping of switches, the pressing of buttons and the turning of knobs and dials occupied Spruce's attention for several minutes.

At first, as I stared through the tube, I saw nothing at all. Then there came a flashing of lights; then some blurred hastily moving figures; then some minute whirling orbs, which rapidly grew in size. "Now you're getting down into the infra-small," I heard the voice of Spruce droning on above the continuous whirring and buzzing of motors. "Now you're delving into the heart of matter. Behold the molecules!"

My impression was of a field crossed by a multitude of cannon balls, speeding in all directions through a tremendous space with incredible rapidity.

But in a second these had vanished. "Getting smaller, smaller, smaller," Spruce announced. "Down, down to the depths of the atom. Down, down, down to the infra-world within the atom."

A moment later, I saw a fiercely bright orb reminding me of a sun. It looked about the size of our own sun in the noon skies; and a multitude of little particles were whirling around it with a speed that I could hardly follow. Then in the remote distance I made out other such suns, and other particles wheeling around them. "Smaller,

smaller, smaller, smaller!" I still heard Spruce's voice; and that whole planetary universe was shrinking, until the suns made no more than little starlike points against a blackground, and formed themselves into constellations, unfamiliar constellations, which illuminated night skies that no human gaze had ever fallen upon before.

"Within the atom," I heard Spruce droning, "the miniature solar system. Multitudes of these systems band themselves into constellations and star groups."

Even as he spoke, the universe seen through the eye-piece continued to shrink. The constellations receded, and gave way to a faint filmy haze, reminding me of the Milky Way; and nebulous masses collected here and there, hazy and far-away as remote spirals seen through a telescope. "Island universes!" Spruce explained. . . . "Each in itself composed of millions of solar systems! Each solar system comprised of a family of worlds! Many of those worlds inhabited by peoples that live through a slow process of growth and decay, of wars and revolutions, of striving and aspiring, and of bewilderment and grief before the descent of the eventual night."

"But you mean to say this is all in the heart of an atom?" I cried, withdrawing momentarily from the eye-piece. "How can this be, how can this possibly be in so minute a space?"

"In the sight of the Absolute, there is no great and no small," stated Spruce. "All is relative, time and space and even consciousness, in a way never conceived in the theories of Einstein. But look, Clifton! You are missing much!"

I returned to the eye-piece, and was astonished to see that the galaxies had vanished. Only a vague mist of light indicated that they had ever been. And all else was blackness.

"You have missed ages of time," Spruce informed me. "On the scale of the infra-small, what was only a moment to you was a period equivalent to billions of our years. But look again, and see the processes of cosmic regeneration!"

Then before my eyes new nebulae arose, and out of the new nebulae multitudes of solar systems, each with its retinue of planets, moons and comets; and fresh constellations and star clusters and galaxies were formed, until once more the processes of decay and dissolution had swept them all from view. But the whole evolution seemed to occupy no more than the time it takes to tell about it.

"I dare say," continued Spruce, "that if we could look within the infra-atoms composing those systems, we would find infra-universes, forming and fading in the duration of a lightning flash, each with their races of living beings that thrive and vanish. For we have seen that the small is in all things the replica of the great. Do you want further proof?"

A little stunned, I nodded in the affirmative.

"Then let us turn to the super-phase of the investigation. I have here the equivalent of a telescope of inconceivably vaster range than any known before, since it operates by magnifying the cosmic rays and other invisible radiations until they tell their whole history—reveal all things with which they have been in contact. Shall we begin?"

"Why not?"

He turned a switch, causing a dazzle of colored lights to flash before my eyes; while I remained seated in my former place. "Now observe!" he directed.

Again I saw the sunlike orbs, with small shining particles circling about them so rapidly that my eyes could

hardly follow their movements. "I have accelerated the time scheme," confessed Spruce, "so as to condense millions of years into a second."

As before, I had the sense of a shrinking universe; the sun dwindled rapidly, until it was no more than of a myriad, which made mere starlike points against a black background, and formed themselves into constellations—not the same as I had just seen, but very like them, and no more familiar. "Larger, larger, larger!" came the drone of Spruce's voice. And the constellations receded, and formed themselves into a faint filmy haze like that of the Milky Way; and nebulous masses collected here and there, hazy and far-away as remote spirals seen through a telescope. These I knew, without Spruce's explanation, to be island universes, each composed of multitudes of solar systems, many of them doubtless containing inhabited worlds, where unimaginable peoples lived and bled and died. This time, I realized, I was looking at the heart of cosmic space, and not within the atom, looking out across the vastnesss of thousands or hundreds of thousands of light-years, wherein one might travel at a speed that would encircle the earth in little more than an eighth of a second, and yet would scarcely approach one's destination in the course of milleniums.

Strangely, the universe of super-space seemed almost identical with the universe of infra-space!

"Larger, larger, larger!" Spruce continued to drone; and as I watched I saw how those galaxies, composed of hundreds of millions of worlds, were receding into illimitable distance; and how they formed themselves into clusters, into super-galaxies, in each of which a conglomeration of millions or billions of worlds was no more than a mote of dust in a wind storm. And those super-galaxies themselves retreated, shining dim and ghostly against the

background of night, until they were mere specks amid vastly greater aggregations. And after a time, to my utter bewilderment, all those clusters of clusters of super-galaxies shrank until I saw no more than a single point of light whirling about an invisible center; and I heard the tones of Spruce, calm and composed as ever, "Behold, Clifton, an atom! All those galaxies of galaxies form but an atom in super-space! And that atom is but one of an inconceivable multitude comprising the worlds of super-space, so immeasurably vast that they must forever remain beyond range of our vision. To the creatures of those worlds, time moves so slowly that all the eons which have passed since the evolvment of the earth from the primal nebula would hardly be long enough for the winking of an eye. And all the universe that we can see with our most powerful telescopes is too minute for the lenses of their microscopes."

"But how do you know all that, Spruce?" I demanded. "My God, how do you know all that?"

His speech was slow and measured, his smile undisturbed as ever as he replied, "I know it, Clifton, because it is the law—the law of relativity. I know it because my researches have demonstrated that the infinitely small is a reproduction of the infinitely great, and the infinitely great of the infinitely small. Universe within universe within universe is the basis of all creation."

He still smiled in that tantalizingly serene manner, like one beyond hurt by man or circumstance. And gazing at that unruffled countenance, I was unable to decide whether Spruce were a hopeless lunatic, or the supreme scientist and discoverer of all time. In any case, remembering the worlds beyond worlds beyond worlds which he had revealed to me in infra-space and in super-space, I could understand why he was so boundlessly calm about

the storms and upheavals and the personal incidents of this unthinkably tiny fragment of reality that calls itself the earth.

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I still felt much the same a month later, when I learned one day that Spruce had been found dead in his rooms, the victim of a heart attack. I was not really disturbed for his sake, for I knew that he was a free man at last, free to enter those awe-inspiring realms which his spirit had roamed even while his body dwelt on earth. There was, however, one respect in which I did feel regret. Despite the pains he had taken to show me the wonders of the Universe Ranger, he had forgotten to reveal the secrets of its operation to me or anyone else—perhaps only a natural lapse of memory in one whose mind dwelt in the vastnesses among the sub-atoms and the super-galaxies. The Universe Ranger was indeed still present, but it was a mere blind machine, which no one could warm into action. For days we pondered over it and experimented with it in vain; for days we searched among Spruce's papers, but all that we could find were some illegible scrawls—some formulæ and symbols that no one thus far has been able to decipher.

But we have not yet given up. We still hope that some lucky clue will sometime reward the seekers; and when that hour comes, the Universe Ranger will again make its spectacular revelations, and the gulfs of the infinitesimal and the peaks of the infinite will once more become visible to earthly eyes.

THE BOOK SHELF

A department devoted to reviews of current books, limited mostly to those which have been mailed to us for that purpose---and the space available.

THE BIG EYE by Max Erlich.

Doubleday, \$2.50

THE first of Doubleday's entries into the science fiction field is a novel of the year 1960. Russia and the United States are on the eve of an atomic war. The city of New York is deserted as its fear-ridden citizens flee before the bombs start to fall. Since mysterious explosions, etc., have been occurring with increasing regularity, Russia is blamed for having invented a new weapon and the hotheads of the American military are trying desperately to start a "preventative war". Suddenly from Mount Palomar comes the announcement that within two years the Earth will collide with a wandering planet called The Big Eye. Naturally warfare is forgotten as earthmen prepare to meet their doom. Up to this point the story is well written even if the plot is not precisely original. But a note of incongruity is introduced when the scientists take time out to argue the merits of scientific progress versus metaphysical manifestations. In addition the ending is hardly convincing.

Planets of Adventure, by Basil Wells,

FPCI, \$3.00

HERE are 280 pages of adventure fiction. Well paced action, and good characterizations make each of the fifteen stories interesting reading. Most of the tales are science fiction; several are weird fantasy with the story "The Twisted Man" being particularly intriguing. A good volume.

"1984," by George Orwell

Harcourt, Brace, \$3.00

THE scene is England in 1984 at a period when socialism has degenerated into a form of fascism that is based on Nazism, with the usual thought-police, spy rays, propaganda barrages, changes in the history records, continuous wars and other devices employed by the unpopular ruling class. The hero is a weakling and a great portion of the book is devoted to his emotional activities. While the American press has hailed the book as an example of what will happen to any country which becomes socialistic many educators and scientists, with whom this reader has talked, found the book to be a satire on capitalism. Any American reader who is interested in the development of his own form of government would find the recent Signet Book, "No Pockets in a Shroud" of more immediate concern than 1984. In addition "No Pockets in a Shroud" only costs 25 cents. A pointed commentary on the American free press theory is the fact that "No Pockets in a Shroud", a story of America, was not published in the USA in book form. Apparently no American publisher had the necessary intestinal fortitude to print this story. The plain truth is that people would rather read about some one else's mistakes than about their own.

TRITON by L. Ron Hubbard

FPCI, \$3.00

A zany tale of a befuddled man and his problems. To escape an undesired marriage Bill Greyson fakes insanity. His family promptly throw him into a Florida sanatorium where Greyson makes friends with the guards. Bribing his way out one afternoon (so he can go deep sea fishing) Greyson accidentally hooks a Triton, a nephew of Neptune. From this meeting on till the last page, Greyson is pursued and bedevilled by the Triton. The chase leads Greyson into Neptune's underwater realm, and through the Florida swampland; in and out of the private madhouse, and finally to an exciting and humorous climax. A wild and wooly comedy.

THE HUMANOIDS by Jack Williamson Simon & Shuster, \$2

WE did not receive a review copy of this book so cannot guarantee that the publishers did not change the original story as printed in Astounding Science Fiction. But since the novel was one of the best in recent years we mention it here in the belief that many readers may wish to have it in permanent form. The suspense begins when Dr. Claypool, a middle-aged astronomer, first learns of the existence of the Humanoids, a race of robots designed for the purpose of protecting and preserving mankind. Claypool joins a group of rebels, among which is the inventor of the robots, who plan to destroy the Humanoids. The oddly assorted group possess some unusual powers and the conflict between the rebels and the robots, while not physical, is none-the-less terrific. The ending (as printed in the magazine version) was a tremendous relief from the "hail the conquering hero" type of story printed far too often.

THE RADIUM POOL by Ed Earl Repp

FPCI, \$3.00

THIS is a tale from the Amazing Stories of the famous Gernsback era. The story tells of the search of two men for a vanished woman. They follow a nebulous trail into the Caverns beneath Death Valley and find a strange pool containing the secret of immortality, weird creatures from space and the mysterious girl. Contrary to all expectations the men do not rescue the beautiful maiden in distress. The author may have had a sequel in mind.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION: 1949 Frederick Fell, \$2.95

THE majority of the stories in this collection are good. Bradbury fans will be delighted with his two contributions. Kuttner is also present with two (at least) stories. Other tales in the volume are "The Strange Case of John Kingman" one of Murray Leinster's best; "Genius" (a whole planet of them) by Poul Anderson; "Knock", a story of the last man on Earth, by Frederic Brown, plus Asimov, Gardner, Shiras.

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SCANNERS LIVE IN VAIN

BY CORDWAINER SMITH

This story deals with science-fiction's oldest subject—space-travel. Yet the author's treatment of the subject is so completely different that it makes "SCANNERS" one of the most outstanding stories to appear in any magazine!

MARTEL was angry. He did not even adjust his blood away from anger. He stamped across the room by judgment, not by sight. When he saw the table hit the floor, and could tell by the expression on Luci's face that the table must have made a loud crash, he looked down to see if his leg were broken. It was not. Scanner to the core, he had to scan himself. The action was reflex and automatic. The inventory included his legs, abdomen, Chest-box of instruments, hands, arms, face and back with the Mirror. Only then did Martel go back to being angry. He talked with his voice, even though he knew that his wife hated its blare and preferred to have him write.

"I tell you, I must cranch. I have to cranch. It's my worry, isn't it?"

When Luci answered, he saw only a part of her words as he read her lips: "Darling... you're my husband... right to love you... dangerous... do it... dangerous... wait..."

He faced her, but put sound in his voice, letting the blare hurt her again: "I tell you, I'm going to cranch."

Catching her expression, he became rueful and a little tender: "Can't you understand what it means to me? To get out of this horrible prison in my own head? To be *feel* again—to feel my feet on the ground, to feel the air a man again—hearing your voice, smelling smoke? To move against my face? Don't you know what it means?"

Her wide-eyed worrisome concern thrust him back into pure annoyance. He read only a few words as her lips moved: "...love you... your own good... don't you think I want you to be human?... your own good... too much... he said... they said..."

When he roared at her, he realized that his voice must be particularly bad. He knew that the sound hurt her no less than did the words: "Do you think I wanted you to marry a Scanner? Didn't I tell you we're almost as low as the habermans? We're dead, I tell you. We've got to be dead to do our work. How can anybody go to the Up-and-Out? Can you dream what raw Space is? I warned you. But you married me. All right, you married a man. Please, darling, let me be a man. Let me hear your voice, let me feel the warmth of being alive, of being human. Let me!"

He saw by her look of stricken assent that he had won the argument. He did not use his voice again. Instead, he pulled his tablet up from where it hung against his chest. He wrote on it, using the pointed fingernail of his right forefinger—the Talking Nail of a Scanner—in quick cleancut script: "Pls, drlng, whrs Crnching Wire?"

She pulled the long gold-sheathed wire out of the pocket of her apron. She let its field sphere fall to the carpeted floor. Swiftly, dutifully, with the deft obedience of a Scanner's wife, she wound the Cranching Wire around his head, spirally around his neck and chest. She avoided the instruments set in his chest. She even avoided the

radiating scars around the instruments, the stigmata of men who had gone Up and into the Out. Mechanically he lifted a foot as she slipped the wire between his feet. She drew the wire taut. She snapped the small plug into the High Burden Control next to his Heart Reader. She helped him to sit down, arranging his hands for him, pushing his head back into the cup at the top of the chair. She turned then, full-face toward him, so that he could read her lips easily. Her expression was composed.

She knelt, scooped up the sphere at the other end of the wire, stood erect calmly, her back to him. He scanned her, and saw nothing in her posture but grief which would have escaped the eye of anyone but a Scanner. She spoke: he could see her chest-muscles moving. She realized that she was not facing him, and turned so that he could see her lips.

"Ready at last?"

He smiled a yes.

She turned her back to him again. (Luci could never bear to watch him Under-the-wire.) She tossed the wire-sphere into the air. It caught in the force-field, and hung there. Suddenly it glowed. That was all. All—except for the sudden red stinking roar of coming back to his senses. Coming back, across the wild threshold of pain.

I

When he awakened under the wire, he did not feel as though he had just crunched. Even though it was the second crunching within the week, he felt fit. He lay in the chair. His ears drank in the sound of air touching things in the room. He heard Luci breathing in the next room, where she was hanging up the wire to cool. He smelt the thousand-and-one smells that are in anybody's room: the crisp freshness of the germ-burner, the sour-

sweet tang of the humidifier, the odor of the dinner they had just eaten, the smells of clothes, furniture, of people themselves. All these were pure delight. He sang a phrase or two of his favorite song:

• "Here's to the haberman, Up and Out!

"Up—oh!— and Out— oh!— Up and Out!..."

He heard Luci chuckle in the next room. He gloated over the sounds of her dress as she swished to the doorway.

She gave him her crooked little smile. "You sound all right. Are you all right, really?"

Even with this luxury of senses, he scanned. He took the flash-quick inventory which constituted his professional skill. His eyes swept in the news of the instruments. Nothing showed off scale, beyond the Nerve Compression hanging in the edge of "Danger." But he could not worry about the Nerve box. That always came through Cranching. You couldn't get under the wire without having it show on the Nerve box. Some day the box would go to *Overload* and drop back down to *Dead*. That was the way a haberman ended. But you couldn't have everything. People who went to the Up-and-Out had to pay the price for Space.

Anyhow, he should worry! He was a Scanner. A good one, and he knew it. If he couldn't scan himself, who could? This cranching wasn't too dangerous. Dangerous, but not too dangerous.

Luci put out her hand and ruffled his hair as if she had been reading his thoughts, instead of just following them: "But you know you shouldn't have! You shouldn't!"

"But I did!" He grinned at her.

Her gaiety still forced, she said: "Come on, darling, let's have a good time. I have almost everything there is in the icebox— all your favorite tastes. And I have

two new records just full of smells. I tried them out myself, and even I liked them. And you know me—”

“Which?”

“Which what, you old darling?”

He slipped his hand over her shoulders as he limped out of the room. (He could never go back to feeling the floor beneath his feet, feeling the air against his face, without being bewildered and clumsy. As if cranching was real, and being a haberman was a bad dream. But he *was* a haberman, and a Scanner.) “You know what I meant, Luci... the smells, which you have. Which one did you like, on the record?”

“Well-l-l,” said she, judiciously, “there were some lamb chops that were the strangest things—”

He interrupted: “What are lambtchots?”

“Wait till you smell them. Then guess. I’ll tell you this much. It’s a smell hundreds and hundreds of years old. They found about it in the old books.”

“Is a lambtchot a Beast?”

“I won’t tell you. You’ve got to wait,” she laughed, as she helped him sit down and spread his tasting dishes before him. He wanted to go back over the dinner first, sampling all the pretty things he had eaten, and savoring them this time with his now-living lips and tongue.

When Luci had found the Music Wire and had thrown its sphere up into the force-field, he reminded her of the new smells. She took out the long glass records and set the first one into a transmitter.

“Now sniff!”

A queer frightening, exciting smell came over the room. It seemed like nothing in this world, nor like anything from the Up-and-Out. Yet it was familiar. His mouth watered. His pulse beat a little faster; he scanned his Heart box. (Faster, sure enough.) But that smell,

what was it? In mock perplexity, he grabbed her hands, looked into her eyes, and growled:

"Tell me, darling! Tell me, or I'll eat you up!"

"That's just right!"

"What?"

"You're right. It should make you want to eat me. It's meat."

"Meat. Who?"

"Not a person," said she, knowledgeably, "a beast. A beast which people used to eat. A lamb was a small sheep—you've seen sheep out in the Wild, haven't you?—and a chop is part of its middle— here!" She pointed at her chest.

Martel did not hear her. All his boxes had swung over toward Alarm, some to Danger. He fought against the roar of his own mind, forcing his body into excess excitement. How easy it was to be a Scanner when you really stood outside your own body, haberman-fashion, and looked back into it with your eyes alone. Then you could manage the body, rule it coldy even in the enduring agony of Space. But to realize that you *were* a body, that this thing was ruling you, that the mind could kick the flesh and send it roaring off into panic! That was bad.

He tried to remember the days before he had gone into the Haberman Device, before he had been cut apart for the Up-and-Out. Had he always been subject to the rush of his emotions from his mind to his body, from his body back to his mind, confounding him so that he couldn't Scan? But he hadn't been a Scanner then.

He knew what had hit him. Amid the roar of his own pulse, he knew. In the nightmare of the Up-and-Out, that smell had forced its way through to him, while their ship burned off Venus and the habermans fought the collapsing metal with their bare hands. He had scanned

then: all were in *Danger*. Chestboxes went up to *Overload* and dropped to *Dead* all around him as he had moved from man to man, shoving the drifting corpses out of his way as he fought to scan each man in turn, to clamp vises on unnoticed broken legs, to snap the Sleeping Valve on men whose instruments showed they were hopelessly near overload. With men trying to work and cursing him for a Scanner while he, professional zeal aroused, fought to do his job and keep them alive in the Great Pain of Space, he had smelled that smell. It had fought its way along his rebuilt nerves, past the Haberman cuts, past all the safeguards of physical and mental discipline. In the wildest hour of tragedy, he had smelled aloud. He remembered it was like a bad cranching, connected with the fury and nightmare all around him. He had even stopped his work to scan himself, fearful that the First Effect might come, breaking past all Haberman cuts and ruining him with the Pain of Space. But he had come through. His own instruments stayed and stayed at *Danger*, without nearing *Overload*. He had done his job, and won a commendation for it. He had even forgotten the burning ship.

All except the smell.

And here the smell was all over again—the smell of meat-with-fire. . . .

Luci looked at him with wifely concern. She obviously thought he had crunched too much, and was about to haberman back. She tried to be cheerful: "You'd better rest, honey."

He whispered to her: "Cut— off— that— smell."

She did not question his word. She cut the transmitter. She even crossed the room and stepped up the room controls until a small breeze flitted across the floor and drove the smells up to the ceiling.

He rose, tired and stiff. (His instruments were normal, except that Heart was fast and Nerves still hanging on the edge of *Danger*.) He spoke sadly:

"Forgive me, Luci. I suppose I shouldn't have crunched. Not so soon again. But darling, I have to get out from being a haberman. How can I ever be near you? How can I be a man—not hearing my own voice, not even feeling my own life as it goes through my veins? I love you, darling. Can't I ever be near you?"

Her pride was disciplined and automatic: "But you're a Scanner!"

"I know I'm a Scanner. But so what?"

She went over the words, like a tale told a thousand times to reassure herself: "You are the bravest of the brave, the most skilful of the skilled. All Mankind owes most honor to the Scanner, who unites the Earths of Mankind. Scanners are the protectors of the Habermans. They are the judges in the Up-and Out. They make men live in the place where men need desperately to die. They are the most honored of Mankind, and even the Chiefs of the Instrumentality are delighted to pay them homage!"

With obstinate sorrow he demurred: "Luci, we've heard that all before. But does it pay us back—"

"Scanners work for more than pay. They are the strong guards of Mankind.' Don't you remember that?"

"But our lives, Luci. What can you get out of being the wife of a Scanner? Why did you marry me? I'm human only when I crunch. The rest of the time—you know what I am. A machine. A man turned into a machine. A man who has been killed and kept alive for duty. Don't you realize what I miss?"

"Of course, darling, of course—"

He went on: "Don't you think I remember my childhood? Don't you think I remember what it is to be a

man and not a haberman? To walk and feel my feet on the ground? To feel a decent clean pain instead of watching my body every minute to see if I'm alive? How will I know if I'm dead? Did you ever think of that, Luci? How will I know if I'm dead?"

She ignored the unreasonableness of his outburst. Pacifyingly, she said: "Sit down, darling. Let me make you some kind of a drink. You're over-wrought."

Automatically, he scanned: "No I'm not! Listen to me. How do you think it feels to be in the Up-and-Out with the crew tied-for-space all around you? How do you think it feels to watch them sleep? How do you think I like scanning, scanning, scanning month after month, when I can feel the pain-of-Space beating against every part of my body, trying to get past my Haberman blocks? How do you think I like to wake the men when I have to, and have them hate me for it? Have you ever seen habermans fight— strong men fighting, and neither knowing pain, fighting until one touches *Overload*? Do you think about that, Luci?" Triumphantlly he added: "Can you blame me if I cranch, and come back to being a man, just two days a month?"

"I'm not blaming you, darling. Let's enjoy your cranch. Sit down now, and have a drink."

He was sitting down, resting his face in his hands, while she fixed the drink, using natural fruits out of bottles in addition to the secure alkaloids. He watched her restlessly and pitied her for marrying a scanner; and then, though it was unjust, resented having to pity her.

Just as she turned to hand him the drink, they both jumped a little as the phone rang. It should not have rung. They had turned it off. It rang again, obviously on the emergency circuit. Stepping ahead of Luci, Martel

strode over to the phone and looked into it. Vomact was looking at him.

The custom of Scanners entitled him to be brusque, even with a Senior Scanner, on certain given occasions. This was one.

Before Vomact could speak, Martel spoke two words into the plate, not caring whether the old man could read lips or not:

"Cranching. Busy."

He cut the switch and went back to Luci.

The phone rang again.

Luci said, gently, "I can find out what it is, darling. Here, take your drink and sit down."

"Leave it alone," said her husband. "No one has a right to call when I'm cranching. He knows that. He ought to know that."

The phone rang again. In a fury, Martel rose and went to the plate. He cut it back on. Vomact was on the screen. Before Martel could speak, Vomact held up his Talking Nail in line with his Heartbox. Martel reverted to discipline:

"Scanner Martel present and waiting, sir."

The lips moved solemnly: "Top emergency."

"Sir, I am under the wire."

"Top emergency."

"Sir, don't you understand? Martel mouthed his words, so he could be sure that Vomact followed. "I....am....underthe....wire. Unfit..for..Space!"

Vomact repeated: "Top emergency. Report to your central tie-in"

"But, sir, no emergency like this—"

"Right, Martel. No emergency like this, ever before. Report to tie-in." With a faint glint of kindness, Vomact added: "No need to de-cranch. Report as you are."

This time it was Martel whose phone was cut out. The screen went gray.

He turned to Luci. The temper had gone out of his voice. She came to him. She kissed him, and rumbled his hair. All she could say was,

"I'm sorry."

She kissed him again, knowing his disappointment. "Take good care of yourself, darling. I'll wait."

He scanned, and slipped into his transparent aircoat. At the window he paused, and waved. She called, "Good luck!" As the air flowed past him he said to himself,

"This is the first time I've felt flight in— eleven years. Lord, but it's easy to fly if you can feel yourself live!"

Central Tie-in glowed white and austere far ahead. Martel peered. He saw no glare of incoming ships from the Up-and-Out, no shuddering flare of Space-fire out of control. Everything was quiet, as it should be on an off-duty night.

And yet Vomact had called. He had called an emergency higher than Space. There was no such thing. But Vomact had called it.

2

When Martel got there, he found about half the Scanners present, two dozen or so of them. He lifted the Talking finger. Most of the Scanners were standing face to face, talking in pairs as they read lips. A few of the old, impatient ones were scribbling on their Tablets and then thrusting the Tablets into other people's faces. All the faces wore the dull dead relaxed look of a haberman. When Martel entered the room, he knew that most of the others laughed in the deep isolated privacy of their own minds, each thinking things it would be useless to express in formal words. It had been a long time since a Scanner showed up at a meeting crunched.

Vomact was not there: probably, thought Martel, he was still on the phone calling others. The light of the phone flashed on and off; the bell rang. Martel felt odd when he realized that of all those present, he was the only one to hear that loud bell. It made him realize why ordinary people did not like to be around groups of habermans or Scanners. Martel looked around for company.

His friend Chang was there, busy explaining to some old and testy Scanner that he did not know why Vomact had called. Martel looked further and saw Parizianski. He walked over, threading his way past the others with a dexterity that showed he could feel his feet from the inside, and did not have to watch them. Several of the others stared at him with their dead faces, and tried to smile. But they lacked full muscular control and their faces twisted into horrid masks. (Scanners knew better than to show expression on faces which they could no longer govern. Martel added to himself, I swear *I'll* never smile again unless I'm crunched.)

Parizianski gave him the sign of the Talking Finger. Looking face to face, he spoke:

"You come here crunched?"

Parizianski could not hear his own voice, so the words roared like the words on a broken and screeching phone; Martel was startled, but knew that the inquiry was well meant. No one could be better-natured than the burly Pole.

"Vomact called. Top emergency."

"You told him you were crunched?"

"Yes."

"He still made you come?"

"Yes."

"Then all this—it is not for Space? You could not go Up-and-Out? You are like ordinary men?"

"That's right."

"Then why did he call us?" Some pre-Haberman habit made Parizianski wave his arms in inquiry. The hand struck the back of the old man behind them. The slap could be heard throughout the room, but only Martel heard it. Instinctively, he scanned Parizianski and the old Scanner: they scanned him back, and then asked why. Only then did the old man ask why Martel had scanned him. When Martel explained that he was under-the-wire, the old man moved swiftly away to pass on the news that there was a crunched Scanner present at the Tie-in.

Even this minor sensation could not keep the attention of most of the Scanners from the worry about the Top Emergency. One young man, who had Scanned his first transit just the year before, dramatically interposed himself between Paizianski and Martel. He dramatically flashed his Tablet at them:

Is Vmct mad?

The older men shook their heads. Martel, remembering that it had not been too long that the young man had been haberman, mitigated the dead solemnity of the denial with a friendly smile. He spoke in a normal voice, saying:

"Vomact is the Senior of Scanners. I am sure that he could not go mad. Would he not see it on his boxes first?"

Martel had to repeat the question, speaking slowly and mouthing his words before the young Scanner could understand the comment. The young man tried to make his face smile, and twisted it into a comic mask. But he took up his tablet and scribbled:

Yr rght.

Chang broke away from his friend and came over, his

half-Chinese face gleaming in the warm evening. (It's strange, thought Martel that more Chinese don't become scanners. Or not so strange perhaps, if you think that they never fill their quota of habermans. Chinese love good living too much. The ones who do scan are all good ones.) Chang saw that Martel was crunched, and spoke with voice:

"You break precedents. Luci must be angry to lose you?"

"She took it well. Chang, that's strange."

"What?"

"I'm crunched, and I can hear. Your voice sounds all right. How did you learn to talk like—like an ordinary person?"

"I practised with soundtracks. Funny you noticed it. I think I am the only Scanner in or between the Earths who can pass for an Ordinary Man. Mirrors and soundtracks. I found out how to act."

"But you don't. . .?"

"No. I don't feel, or taste, or hear, or smell things, any more than you do. Talking doesn't do me much good. But I notice that it cheers up the people around me."

"It would make a difference in the life of Luci."

Chang nodded sagely. "My father insisted on it. He said, 'You may be proud of being a Scanner. I am sorry you are not a Man. Conceal your defects.' So I tried. I wanted to tell the old boy about the Up and Out, and what we did there, but it did not matter. He said, 'Airplanes were good enough for Confucius, and they are for me too.' The old humbug! He tries so hard to be a Chinese when he can't even read Old Chinese. But he's got wonderful good sense, and for somebody going on two hundred he certainly gets around."

Martel smiled at the thought: "In his airplane?"

Chang smiled back. This discipline of his facial muscles was amazing; a bystander would not think that Chang was a haberman, controlling his eyes, cheeks, and lips by cold intellectual control. The expression had the spontaneity of life. Martel felt a flash of envy for Chang when he looked at the dead cold faces of Parizianski and the others. He knew that he himself looked fine: but why shouldn't he? he was crunched. Turning to Parizianski he said,

"Did you see what Chang said about his father? The old boy uses an airplane."

Parizianski made motions with his mouth, but the sounds meant nothing. He took up his tablet and showed it to Martel and Chang.

Bzz bzz. Ha ha. Gd ol' boy.

At that moment, Martel heard steps out in the corridor. He could not help looking toward the door. Other eyes followed the direction of his glance.

Vomact came in.

The group shuffled to attention in four parallel lines. They scanned one another. Numerous hands reached across to adjust the electrochemical controls on chest-boxes which had begun to load up. One Scanner held out a broken finger which his counter-Scanner had discovered, and submitted it for treatment and splinting.

Vomact had taken out his Staff of Office. The cube at the top flashed red light through the room, the lines reformed, and all Scanners gave the sign meaning

Present and ready!

Vomact countered with the stance signifying, *I am the Senior and take Command.*

Talking fingers rose in the counter-gesture, *We concur and commit ourselves.*

Vomact raised his right arm, dropped the wrist as though it were broken, in a queer searching gesture, meaning: *Any men around? Any habermans not tied? All clear for the Scanners?*

Alone of all those present, the crunched Martel heard the queer rustle of feet as they all turned completely around without leaving position, looking sharply at one another and flashing their beltlights into the dark corners of the great room. When again they faced Vomact, he made a further sign:

All clear. Follow my words.

Martel noticed that he alone relaxed. The others could not know the meaning of relaxation with the minds blocked off up there in their skulls, connected only with the eyes, and the rest of the body connected with the mind only by controlling non-sensory nerves and the instrument boxes on their chests. Martel realized that, crunched as he was, he expected to hear Vomact's voice: the Senior had been talking for some time. No sound escaped his lips. (Vomact never bothered with sound.)

"...and when the first men to go Up and Out went to the Moon, what did they find?"

"Nothing," responded the silent chorus of lips.

"Therefore they went further, to Mars and to Venus. The ships went out year by year, but they did not come back until the Year One of Space. Then did a ship come back with the First Effect. Scanners, I ask you, what is the First Effect?"

"No one knows. No one knows."

"No one will ever know. Too many are the variables. By what do we know the First Effect?"

"By the Great Pain of Space," came the chorus.

"And by what further sign?"

"By the need, oh the need for death."

Vomact again: "And who stopped the need for death?"

"Henry Haberman conquered the first effect, in the Year 3 of Space."

"And, Scanners, I ask you, what did he do?"

"He made the habermans."

"How, O Scanners, are habermans made?"

"They are made with the cuts. The brain is cut from the heart, the lungs. The brain is cut from the ears, the nose. The brain is cut from the mouth, the belly. The brain is cut from desire, and pain. The brain is cut from the world. Save for the eyes. Save for the control of the living flesh."

"And how, O Scanners is flesh controlled?"

"By the boxes set in the flesh, the controls set in the chest, the signs made to rule the living body, the signs by which the body lives."

"How does a haberman live and live?"

"The haberman lives by control of the boxes."

"Whence come the habermans?"

Martel felt in the coming response a great roar of broken voices echoing through the room as the Scanners, habermans themselves, put sound behind their mouthings:

"Habermans are the scum of Mankind. Habermans are the weak, the cruel, the credulous, and the unfit. Habermans are the sentenced-to-more-than-death. Habermans live in the mind alone. They are killed for Space but they live for Space. They master the ships that connect the earths. They live in the Great Pain while ordinary men sleep in the cold cold sleep of the transit."

"Brothers and Scanners, I ask you now: are we habermans or are we not?"

"We are habermans in the flesh. We are cut apart, brain and flesh. We are ready to go to the Up and Out. All of us have gone through the Haberman Device."

"We are habermans then?" Vomact's eyes flashed and glittered as he asked the ritual question.

Again the chorused answer was accompanied by a roar of voices heard only by Martel: "Habermans we are, and more, and more. We are the Chosen who are habermans by our own free will. We are the Agents of the Instrumentality of Mankind."

"What must the others say to us?"

"They must say to us, 'You are the bravest of the brave, the most skilful of the skilled. All mankind owes most honor to the Scanner, who unites the Earths of Mankind. Scanners are the protectors of the habermans. They are the judges in the Up-and-Out. They make men live in the place where men need desperately to die. They are the most honored of Mankind, and even the Chiefs of the Instrumentality are delighted to pay them homage!'"

Vomact stood more erect: "What is the secret duty of the Scanner?"

"To keep secret our law, and to destroy the acquirers thereof."

"How to destroy?"

"Twice to the *Overload*, back and *Dead*."

"If habermans die, what the duty then?"

The Scanners all compressed their lips for answer. (Silence was the code.) Martel, who—long familiar with the code—was a little bored with the proceedings, noticed that Chang was breathing too heavily; he reached over and adjusted Chang's Lung-control and received the thanks of Chang's eyes. Vomact observed the interruption and glared at them both. Martel relaxed, trying to imitate the dead cold stillness of the others. It was so hard to do, when you were crunched.

"If others die, what the duty then?" asked Vomact.

"Scanners together inform the Instrumentality. Scan-

ners together accept the punishment. Scanners together settle the case."

"And if the punishment be severe?"

"Then no ships go."

"And if Scanners not be honored?"

"Then no ships go."

"And if a Scanner goes unpaid?"

"Then no ships go."

"And if the Others and the Instrumentality are not in all ways at all times mindful of their proper obligation to the Scanners?"

"Then no ships go,"

"And what, O Scanners, if no ships go?"

"The Earths fall apart. The Wild comes back in. The Old Machines and the Beasts return."

"What is the known duty of a Scanner?"

"Not to sleep in the Up-and-Out."

"What is the second duty of a Scanner?"

"To keep forgotten the name of fear."

"What is the third duty of a Scanner?"

"To use the wire of Eustace Cranch only with care, only with moderation." Several pair of eyes looked quickly at Martel before the mouthed chorus went on. "To cranch only at home, only among friends, only for the purpose of remembering, of relaxing, or of begetting."

"What is the word of the Scanner?"

"Faithful though surrounded by death."

"What is the motto of the Scanner?"

"Awake though surrounded by silence."

"What is the work of the Scanner?"

"Labor even in the heights of the Up-and-Out, loyalty even in the depths of the Earths."

"How do you know a Scanner?"

"We know ourselves. We are dead though we live."

And we Talk with the Tablet and the Nail."

"What is this Code?"

"This Code is the friendly ancient wisdom of Scanners, briefly put that we may be mindful and be cheered by our loyalty to one another."

At this point the formula should have run: "We complete the Code. Is there work or word for the Scanners?" But Vomact said, and he repeated:

"Top emergency. Top emergency."

They gave him the sign, *Present and ready!*

He said, with every eye straining to follow his lips:

"Some of you know the work of Adam Stone?"

Martel saw lips move, saying: "The Red Asteroid. The Other who lives at the edge of Space."

"Adam Stone has gone to the Instrumentality, claiming success for his work. He says that he has found how to Screen Out the Pain of Space. He says that the Up-and-Out can be made safe for ordinary men to work in, to stay awake in. He says that there need be no more Scanners."

Beltlights flashed on all over the room as Scanners sought the right to speak. Vomact nodded to one of the older men. "Scanner Smith will speak."

Smith stepped slowly up into the light, watching his own feet. He turned so that they could see his face. He spoke: "I say that this is a lie. I say that Stone is a liar. I say that the Instrumentality must not be deceived."

He paused. Then, in answer to some question from the audience which most of the others did not see, he said:

"I invoke the secret duty of the Scanners."

Smith raised his right hand for Emergency Attention:

"I say that Stone must die."

3

Martel, still crunched, shuddered as he heard the boos, groans, shouts, squeaks, grunts and moans which came

from the Scanners who forgot noise in their excitement and strove to make their dead bodies talk to one another's deaf ears. Beltlights flashed wildly all over the room. There was a rush for the rostrum and Scanners milled around at the top, vying for attention until Parizianski—by sheer bulk—shoved the others aside and down, and turned to mouth at the group.

“Brother Scanners, I want your eyes.”

The people on the floor kept moving, with their numb bodies jostling one another. Finally Vomact stepped up in front of Parizianski, faced the others, and said:

“Scanners, be Scanners! Give him your eyes.”

Parizianski was not good at public speaking. His lips moved too fast. He waved his hands, which took the eyes of the others away from his lips. Nevertheless, Martel was able to follow most of the message:

“...can't do this. Stone may have succeeded. If he has succeeded, it means the end of the Scanners. It means the end of the habermans, too. None of us will have to fight in the Up-and-Out. We won't have anybody else going under-the-Wire for a few hours or days of being human. Everybody will be Other. Nobody will have to Cranch, never again. Men can be men. The habermans can be killed decently and properly, the way men were killed in the Old Days, without anybody keeping them alive. They won't have to work in the Up-and-Out! There will be no more Great Pain—think of it! No. . . more. . . Great. . . Pain! How do we know that Stone is a liar—” Lights began flashing directly into his eyes. (The rudest insult of Scanner to Scanner was this.)

Vomact again exercised authority. He stepped in front of Parizianski and said something which the others could not see. Parizianski stepped down from the rostrum. Vomact again spoke:

"I think that some of the Scanners disagree with our Brother Parizianski. I say that the use of the rostrum be suspended till we have had a chance for private discussion. In fifteen minutes I will call the meeting back to order."

Martel looked around for Vomact when the Senior had rejoined the group on the floor. Finding the Senior, Martel wrote swift script on his Tablet, waiting for a chance to thrust the Tablet before the Senior's eyes. He had written,

Am crcnhd. Rspctfly request prmissn lv now, stnd by fr orders.

Being crunched did strange things to Martel. Most meetings that he attended seemed formal heartening ceremonial, lighting up the dark inward eternities of habermanhood. When he was not crunched, he noticed his body no more than a marble bust notices its marble pedestal. He had stood with them before. He had stood with them effortless hours, while the long-winded ritual broke through the terrible loneliness behind his eyes, and made him feel that the Scanners, though a confraternity of the damned, were none the less forever honored by the professional requirements of their mutilation.

This time, it was different. Coming crunched, and in full possession of smell-sound-taste-feeling, he reacted more or less as a normal man would. He saw his friends and colleagues as a lot of cruelly driven ghosts, posturing out the meaningless ritual of their indefeasible damnation. What difference did anything make, once you were a haberman? Why all this talk about habermans and Scanners? Habermans were criminals or heretics, and Scanners were gentlemen-volunteers, but they were all in the same fix—except that Scanners were deemed worthy of the short-time return of the Cranching Wire, while

habermans were simply disconnected while the ships lay in port and were left suspended until they should be awakened, in some hour of emergency or trouble, to work out another spell of their damnation. It was a rare haberman that you saw on the street—someone of special merit or bravery, allowed to look at mankind from the terrible prison of his own mechanified body. And yet, what Scanner ever pitied a haberman? What Scanner ever honored a haberman except perfunctorily in the line of duty? What had the Scanners as a guild and a class, ever done for the habermans, except to murder them with a twist of the wrist whenever a haberman, too long beside a Scanner, picked up the tricks of the Scanning trade and learned how to live at his own will, not the will the Scanners imposed? What could the Others, the ordinary men, know of what went on inside the ships? The Others slept in their cylinders, mercifully unconscious until they woke up on whatever other Earth they had consigned themselves to. What could the Others know of the men who had to stay alive within the ship?

What could any Other know of the Up-and-Out? What Other could look at the biting acid beauty of the stars in open space? What could they tell of the Great Pain, which started quietly in the marrow, like an ache, and proceeded by the fatigue and nausea of each separate nerve cell, brain cell, touchpoint in the body, until life itself became a terrible aching hunger for silence and for death?

He was a Scanner. All right, he *was* a Scanner. He had been a Scanner from the moment when, wholly normal, he had stood in the sunlight before a Subchief of Instrumentality, and had sworn:

"I pledge my honor and my life to Mankind. I sacrifice myself willingly for the welfare of Mankind. In accepting the perilous austere Honor, I yield all my rights

without exception to the Honorable Chiefs of the Instrumentality and to the Honored Confraternity of Scanners."

He had pledged.

He had gone into the Haberman Device.

He remembered his Hell. He had not had such a bad one, even though it had seemed to last a hundred million years, all of them without sleep. He had learned to feel with his eyes. He had learned to see despite the heavy eyeplates set back of his eyeballs, to insulate his eyes from the rest of him. He had learned to watch his skin. He still remembered the time he had noticed dampness on his shirt, and had pulled out his Scanning Mirror only to discover that he had worn a hole in his side by leaning against a vibrating machine. (A thing like that could not happen to him now; he was too adept at reading his own instruments.) He remembered the way that he had gone Up-and-Out, and the way that the Great Pain beat into him, despite the fact that his touch, smell, feeling, and hearing were gone for all ordinary purposes. He remembered killing habermans, and keeping others alive, and standing for months beside the Honorable Scanner-Pilot while neither of them slept. He remembered going ashore on Earth Four, and remembered that he had not enjoyed it, and had realized on that day that there was no reward.

Martel stood among the other Scanners. He hated their awkwardness when they moved, their immobility when they stood still. He hated the queer assortment of smells which their bodies yielded unnoticed. He hated the grunts and groans and squawks which they emitted from their deafness. He hated them, and himself.

How could Luci stand him? He had kept his chest-box reading *Danger* for weeks while he courted her, carrying the Cranch Wire about with him most illegally, and

going direct from one cranch to the other without worrying about the fact his indicators all crept up to the edge of *Overload*. He had wooed her without thinking of what would happen if she did say, "Yes." She had.

"And they lived happily ever after." In Old Books they did, but how could they, in life? He had had eighteen days under-the-wire in the whole of the past year! Yet she had loved him. She still loved him. He knew it. She fretted about him through the long months that he was in the Up-and-Out. She tried to make home mean something to him even when he was haberman, make food pretty when it could not be tasted, make herself lovable when she could not be kissed—or might as well not, since a haberman body meant no more than furniture. Luci was patient.

And now, Adam Stone! (He let his Tablet fade: how could he leave, now?)

God bless Adam Stone?

Martel could not help feeling a little sorry for himself. No longer would the high keen call of duty carry him through two hundred or so years of the Other's time, two million private eternities of his own. He could slouch and relax. He could forget High Space, and let the Up-and-Out be tended by Others. He could cranch as much as he dared. He could be almost normal—almost—for one year or five years or no years. But at least he could stay with Luci. He could go with her into the Wild, where there were Beasts and Old Machines still roving the dark places. Perhaps he would die in the excitement of the hunt, throwing spears at an ancient Manshonjagger as it leapt from its lair, or tossing hot spheres at the tribesmen of the Unforgiven who still roamed the Wild. There was still life to live, still a good normal death to die, not the moving of a needle out in the silence and pain of Space!

He had been walking about restlessly. His ears were attuned to the sounds of normal speech, so that he did not feel like watching the mouthings of his brethern. Now they seemed to have come to a decision. Vomact was moving to the rostrum. Martel looked about for Chang, and went to stand beside him. Chang whispered.

"You're as restless as water in mid-air! What's the matter? De-cranching?"

They both scanned Martel, but the instruments held steady and showed no sign of the cranch giving out.

The great light flared in its call to attention. Again they formed ranks. Vomact thrust his lean old face into the glare, and spoke:

"Scanners and Brothers, I call for a vote." He held himself in the stance which meant: "*I am the Senior and take Command.*"

A beltlight flashed in protest.

It was old Henderson. He moved to the rostrum, spoke to Vomact, and—with Vomact's nod of approval—turned full-face to repeat his question:

"Who speaks for the Scanners Out in Space?"

No beltlight or hand answered.

Henderson and Vomact, face to face, conferred for a few moments. Then Henderson faced them again:

"I yield to the Senior in Command. But I do not yield to a Meeting of the Confraternity. There are sixty-eight Scanners, and only forty-seven present, of whom one is crunched and U. D. I have therefore proposed that the Senior in Command assume authority only over an Emergency Committee of the Confraternity, not over a Meeting. Is that agreed and understood by the Honorable Scanners?"

Hands rose in assent.

Chang murmured in Martel's ear, "Lot of difference

that makes! Who can tell the difference between a meeting and a committee?" Martel agreed with the words, but was even more impressed with the way that Chang, while haberman, could control his own voice.

Vomact resumed chairmanship: "We now vote on the question of Adam Stone.

"First, we can assume that he has not succeeded, and that his claims are lies. We know that from our practical experience as Scanners. The Pain of Space is only part of Scanning" (*But the essential part, the basis of it all*, thought Martel.) "and we can rest assured that Stone cannot solve the problem of Space Discipline."

"That tripe again," whispered Chang, unheard save by Martel.

"The Space Discipline of our Confraternity has kept High Space clean of war and dispute. Sixty-eight disciplined men control all High Space. We are removed by our oath and our haberman status from all Earthly passions.

"Therefore, if Adam Stone has conquered the Pain of Space, so that Others can wreck our Confraternity and bring to Space the trouble and ruin which afflicts Earths, I say that Adam Stone is wrong. If Adam Stone succeeds, Scanners live in Vain!

"Secondly, if Adam Stone has not conquered the Pain of Space, he will cause great trouble in all the Earths. The Instrumentality and the Subchiefs may not give us as many habermans as we need to operate the ships of Mankind. There will be wild stories, and fewer recruits and, worst of all, the Discipline of the Confraternity may relax if this kind of nonsensical heresy is spread around.

"Therefore, if Adam Stone has succeeded, he threatens the ruin of the Confraternity and should die.

"I move the death of Adam Stone."

And Vomact made the sign, *The Honorable Scanners are pleased to vote.*

4

Martel grabbed wildly for his beltlight. Chang, guessing ahead, had his light out and ready; its bright beam, voting *No*, shone straight up at the ceiling. Martel got his light out and threw its beam upward in dissent. Then he looked around. Out of the forty-seven present, he could see only five or six glittering.

Two more lights went on. Vomact stood as erect as a frozen corpse. Vomact's eyes flashed as he stared back and forth over the group, looking for lights. Several more went on. Finally Vomact took the closing stance:

May it please the Scanners to count the vote.

Three of the older men went up on the rostrum with Vomact. They looked over the room. (Martel thought: *These damned ghosts are voting on the life of a real man, a live man! They have no right to do it. I'll tell the Instrumentality!* But he knew that he would not. He thought of Luci and what she might gain by the triumph of Adam Stone: the heartbreaking folly of the vote was then almost too much for Martel to bear.)

All three of the tellers held up their hands in unanimous agreement on the sign of the number: *Fifteen against.*

Vomact dismissed them with a bow of courtesy. He turned and again took the stance, *I am the Senior and take Command.*

Marvelling at his own daring, Martel flashed his beltlight on. He knew that anyone of the bystanders might reach over and twist his Heartbox to *Overload* for such an act. He felt Chang's hand reaching to catch him by the aircoat. But he eluded Chang's grasp and ran, faster than a Scanner should, to the platform. As he ran, he won-

dered what appeal to make. It was no use talking commonsense. Not now. It had to be law.

He jumped up on the rostrum beside Vomact, and took the stance: *Scanners, an Illegality!*

He violated good custom while speaking, still in the stance: "A Committee has no right to vote death by a majority vote. It takes two-thirds of a full Meeting."

He felt Vomact's body lunge behind him, felt himself falling from the rostrum, hitting the floor, hurting his knees and his touch-aware hands. He was helped to his feet. He was scanned. Some Scanner he scarcely knew took his instruments and toned him down.

Immediately Martel felt more calm, more detached, and hated himself for feeling so.

He looked up at the rostrum. Vomact maintained the stance signifying: *Order!*

The Scanners adjusted their ranks. The two Scanners next to Martel took his arms. He shouted at them, but they looked away, and cut themselves off from communication altogether.

Vomact spoke again when he saw the room was quiet: "A Scanner came here crunched. Honorable Scanners, I apologize for this. It is not the fault of our great and worthy Scanner and friend, Martel. He came here under orders. I told him not to de-crunch. I hoped to spare him an unnecessary haberman. We all know how happily Martel is married, and we wish his brave experiment well. I like Martel. I respect his judgment. I wanted him here. I knew you wanted him here. But he is crunched. He is in no mood to share in the lofty business of the Scanners. I therefore propose a solution which will meet all the requirements of fairness. I propose that we rule Scanner Martel out of order for his violation of rules.

This violation would be inexcusable if Martel were not crunched.

"But at the same time, in all fairness to Martel, I further propose that we deal with the points raised so improperly by our worthy but disqualified brother."

Vomact gave the sign, *The Honorable Scanners are pleased to vote*. Martel tried to reach his own beltlight; the dead strong hands held him tightly and he struggled in vain. One lone light shone high: Chang's, no doubt.

Vomact thrust his face into the light again: "Having the approval of our worthy Scanners and present company for the general proposal, I now move that this Committee declare itself to have the full authority of a Meeting, and that this Committee further make me responsible for all misdeeds which this Committee may enact, to be held answerable before the next full Meeting, but not before any other authority beyond the closed and secret ranks of Scanners."

Flamboyantly this time, his triumph evident, Vomact assumed the *vote* stance.

Only a few lights shone: far less, patently, than a minority of one-fourth.

Vomact spoke again. The light shone on his high calm forehead, on his dead relaxed cheekbones. His lean cheeks and chin were half-shadowed, save where the lower light picked up and spotlighted his mouth, cruel even in repose. (Vomact was said to be a descendant of some Ancient Lady who had traversed, in an illegitimate and inexplicable fashion, some hundreds of years of time in a single night. Her name, the Lady Vomact, had passed into legend; but her blood and her archaic lust for mastery lived on in the mute masterful body of her descendent. Martel could believe the old tales as he stared at the rostrum, wondering what untraceable mutation had left the

Vomact kith as predators among mankind.) Calling loudly with the movement of his lips, but still without sound, Vomact appealed:

"The Honorable Committee is now pleased to reaffirm the sentence of death issued against the heretic and enemy, Adam Stone." Again the *vote* stance.

Again Chang's light shone lonely in its isolated protest.

Vomact then made his final move:

"I call for the designation of the Senior Scanner present as the manager of the sentence. I call for authorization to him to appoint executioners, one or many, who shall make evident the will and majesty of Scanners. I ask that I be accountable for the deed, and not for the means. The deed is a noble deed, for the protection of Mankind and for the honor of the Scanners; but of the means it must be said that they are to be the best at hand, and no more. Who knows the true way to kill an Other, here on a crowded and watchful earth? This is no mere matter of discharging a cylindered sleeper, no mere question of upgrading the needle of a haberman. When people die down here, it is not like the Up-and-Out. They die reluctantly. Killing within the Earth is not our usual business, O brothers and Scanners, as you know well. You must choose me to choose my agent as I see fit. Otherwise the common knowledge will become the common betrayal whereas if I alone know the responsibility, I alone could betray us, and you will not have far to look in case the Instrumentality comes searching." (*What about the killer you choose?* thought Martel. *He too will know unless—unless you silence him forever.*)

Vomact went into the stance, *The Honorable Scanners are pleased to vote.*

One light of protest shone; Chang's, again.

Martel imagined that he could see a cruel joyful smile

on Vomact's dead face—the smile of a man who knew himself righteous and who found his righteousness upheld and affirmed by militant authority.

Martel tried one last time to come free.

The dead hands held. They were locked like vises until their owners' eyes unlocked them: how else could they hold the piloting month by month?

Martel then shouted: "Honorable Scanners, this is judicial murder."

No ear heard him. He was crunched, and alone.

None the less, he shouted again: "You endanger the confraternity."

Nothing happened.

The echo of his voice sounded from one end of the room to the other. No head turned. No eyes met his.

Martel realized that as they paired for talk, the eyes of the Scanners averted him. He saw that no one desired to watch his speech. He knew that behind the cold faces of his friends there lay compassion or amusement. He knew that they knew him to be crunched—absurd, normal, man-like, temporarily no Scanner. But he knew that in this matter the wisdom of Scanners was nothing. He knew that only a crunched Scanner could feel with his very blood the outrage and anger which deliberate murder would provoke among the Others. He knew that the Confraternity endangered itself, and knew that the most ancient prerogative of law was the monopoly of death. Even the Ancient Nations, in the times of the Wars, before the Beasts, before men went into the Up-and-Out—even the Ancients had known this. How did they say it? *Only the State shall kill.* The States were gone but the Instrumentality remained, and the Instrumentality could not pardon things which occurred within the Earths but beyond its authority. Death in Space was the business,

the right of the Scanners: how could the Instrumentality enforce its laws in a place where all men who wakened, wakened only to die in the Great Pain? _ Wisely did the Instrumentality leave Space to the Scanners, wisely had the Confraternity not meddled inside the Earths. And now the Confraternity itself was going to step forth as an outlaw band, as a gang of rogues as stupid and reckless as the tribes of the unforgiven!

Martel knew this because he was crunched. Had he been haberman, he would have thought only with his mind, not with his heart and guts and blood. How could the other Scanners know?

Vomact returned for the last time to the Rostrum: *The Committee has met and its will shall be done.* Verbally he added: "Senior among you, I ask your loyalty and your silence."

At that point, the two Scanners let his arms go. Martel rubbed his numb hands, shaking his fingers to get the circulation back into the cold fingertips. With real freedom, he began to think of what he might still do. He scanned himself: the crunching held. He might have a day. Well, he could go on even if haberman, but it would be inconvenient, having to talk with Finger and Tablet. He looked about for Chang. He saw his friend standing patient and immobile in a quiet corner. Martel moved slowly, so as not to attract any more attention to himself than could be helped. He faced Chang, moved until his face was in the light, and then articulated:

"What are we going to do? You're not going to let them kill Adam Stone, are you? Don't you realize what Stone's work will mean to us, if it succeeds? No more Scanners. No more habermans. No more Pain in the Up-and-Out. I tell you, if the others were all crunched, as I am, they would see it in a human way, not with the

narrow crazy logic which they used in the meeting. We've got to stop them. How can we do it? What are we going to do? What does Parizianski think? Who has been chosen?"

"Which question do you want me to answer?"

Martel laughed. (It felt good to laugh, even then; it felt like being a man.) "Will you help me?"

Chang's eyes flashed across Martel's face as Chang answered: "No. No. No."

"You won't help?"

"No."

"Why not, Chang? Why not?"

"I am a Scanner. The vote has been taken. You would do the same if you were not in this unusual condition."

"I'm not in an unusual condition. I'm crunched. That merely means that I see things the way that the Others would. I see the stupidity. The recklessness. The selfishness. It is murder."

"What is murder? Have you not killed? You are not one of the Others. You are a Scanner. You will be sorry for what you are about to do, if you do not watch out."

"But why did you vote against Vomact then? Didn't you too see what Adam Stone means to all of us? Scanners will live in vain. Thank God for that! Can't you see it?"

"No."

"But you talk to me, Chang. You are my friend?"

"I talk to you. I am your friend. Why not?"

"But what are you going to do?"

"Nothing, Martel. Nothing."

"Will you help me?"

"No."

"Not even to save Stone?"

"No."

"Then I will go to Parizianski for help."

"It will do you no good."

"Why not? He's more human than you, right now."

"He will not help you, because he has the job. Vomact designated him to kill Adam Stone."

Martel stopped speaking in mid-movement. He suddenly took the stance, *I thank you, brother, and I depart*.

At the window he turned and faced the room. He saw that Vomact's eyes were upon him. He gave the stance, *I thank you, brother, and I depart*, and added the flourish of respect which is shown when Seniors are present. Vomact caught the sign, and Martel could see the cruel lips move. He thought he saw the words "...take good care of yourself. ..." but did not wait to inquire. He stepped backward and dropped out the window.

Once below the window and out of sight, he adjusted his aircoat to maximum speed. He swam lazily in the air, scanning himself thoroughly, and adjusting his adrenal intake down. He then made the movement of release, and felt the cold air rush past his face like running water.

Adam Stone had to be at Chief Downport.

Adam Stone had to be there.

Wouldn't Adam Stone be surprised in the night? Surprised to meet the strangest of beings, the first renegade among Scanners. (Martel suddenly appreciated that it was of himself he was thinking. Martel the Traitor to Scanners! That sounded strange and bad. But what of Martel, the Loyal to Mankind? Was that not compensation? And if he won, he won Luci. If he lost, he lost nothing—an unconsidered and expendable haberman. It happened to be himself. But in contrast to the immense reward, to Mankind, to the Confraternity, to Luci, what did that matter?)

Martel thought to himself: "Adam Stone will have two visitors tonight. Two Scanners, who are the friends of one another." He hoped that Parizianski was still his friend.

"And the world," he added, "depends on which of us gets there first."

Multifaceted in their brightness, the lights of Chief Downport began to shine through the mist ahead. Martel could see the outer towers of the city and glimpsed the phosphorescent Periphery which kept back the wild, whether Beasts, Machines, or the Unforgiven.

Once more Martel invoked the lords of his chance: "Help me to pass for an Other!"

5

Within the Downport, Martel had less trouble than he thought. He draped his aircoat over his shoulder so that it concealed the instruments. He took up his scanning mirror, and made up his face from the inside, by adding tone and animation to his blood and nerves until the muscles of his face glowed and the skin gave out a healthy sweat. That way he looked like an ordinary man who had just completed a long night flight.

After straightening out his clothing, and hiding his tablet within his jacket, he faced the problem of what to do about the Talking Finger. If he kept the nail, it would show him to be a Scanner. He would be respected, but he would be identified. He might be stopped by the guards whom the Instrumentality had undoubtedly set around the person of Adam Stone. If he broke the Nail—But he couldn't! No Scanner in the history of the Confraternity had ever willingly broken his nail. That would be Resignation, and there was no such thing. The only way out, was in the Up-and Out! Martel put his finger

to his mouth and bit off the nail. He looked at the now-queer finger, and sighed to himself.

He stepped toward the city gate, slipping his hand into his jacket and running up his muscular strength to four times normal. He started to scan, and then realized that his instruments were masked. *Might as well take all the chances at once*, he thought.

The watcher stopped him with a searching Wire. The sphere thumped suddenly against Martel's chest.

"Are you a Man?" said the unseen voice. (Martel would have known that as a Scanner in haberman condition, his own field-charge would have illuminated the sphere.)

"I am a Man." Martel knew that the timber of his voice had been good; he hoped that it would not be taken for that of a Manshonjagger or a Beast or an Unforgiven one, who with mimicry sought to enter the cities and ports of Mankind.

"Name, number, rank, purpose, function, time departed."

"Martel." He had to remember his old number, not Scanner 34. "Sunward 4234, 182nd Year of Space. Rank, rising Subchief." That was no lie, but his substantive rank. "Purpose, personal and lawful within the limits of this city. No function of the Instrumentality. Departed Chief Outport 2019 hours." Everything now depended on whether he was believed, or would be checked against Chief Outport.

The voice was flat and routine: "Time desired within the city."

Martel used the standard phrase: "Your Honorable sufferance is requested."

He stood in the cool night air, waiting. Far above him, through a gap in the mist, he could see the poisonous

glittering in the sky of Scanners. *The stars are my enemies*, he thought: *I have mastered the stars but they hate me. Ho, that sounds Ancient! Like a Book. Too much cranching.*

The voice returned: "Sunward 4234 dash 182 rising Subchief Martel, enter the lawful gates of the city. Welcome. Do you desire food, raiment, money, or companionship?" The voice had no hospitality in it, just business. This was certainly different from entering a city in a Scanner's role! Then the petty officers came out, and threw their beltlights in their fretful faces, and mouthed their words with preposterous deference, shouting against the stone deafness of a Scanner's ears. So that was the way that a Subchief was treated: matter of fact, but not bad. Not bad.

Martel replied: "I have that which I need, but beg of the city a favor. My friend Adam Stone is here. I desired to see him, on urgent and personal lawful affairs."

The voice replied: "Did you have an appointment with Adam Stone?"

"No."

"The city will find him. What is his number?"

"I have forgotten it."

"You have forgotten it? Is not Adam Stone a Mag-nate of the Instrumentality? Are you truly his friend?"

"Truly." Martel let a little annoyance creep into his voice. "Watcher, doubt me and call your Subchief."

"No doubt implied. Why do you not know the number? This must go into the record," added the voice.

"We were friends in childhood. He has crossed the—" Martel started to say "the Up-and-Out" and remembered that the phrase was current only among Scanners. "He has leapt from Earth to Earth, and has just now returned.

I knew him well and I seek him out. I have word of his kith. May the Instrumentality protect us!"

"Heard and believed. Adam Stone will be searched."

At a risk, though a slight one, of having the sphere sound an alarm for *non-human*, Martel cut in on his Scanner speaker within his jacket. He saw the trembling needle of light await his words and he started to write on it with his blunt finger. *That won't work*, he thought, and had a moment's panic until he found his comb, which had a sharp enough tooth to write. He wrote: "Emergency none. Martel Scanner calling Parizianski Scanner."

The needle quivered and the reply glowed and faded out: "Parizianski Scanner on duty and D. C. Calls taken by Scanner Relay."

Martel cut off his speaker.

Parizianski was somewhere around. Could he have crossed the direct way, right over the city wall, setting off the alert, and invoking official business when the petty officers overtook him in mid-air? Scarcely. That meant that a number of other Scanners must have come in with Parizianski, all of them pretending to be in search of a few of the tenuous pleasures which could be enjoyed by a haberman, such as the sight of the newspictures or the viewing of beautiful women in the Pleasure Gallery. Parizianski was around, but he could not have moved privately, because Scanner Central registered him on duty and recorded his movements city by city.

The voice returned. Puzzlement was expressed in it. "Adam Stone is found and awakened. He has asked pardon of the Honorable, and says he knows no Martel. Will you see Adam Stone in the morning? The city will bid you welcome."

Martel ran out of resources. It was hard enough mimicking a man without having to tell lies in the guise of

one. Martel could only repeat: "Tell him I am Martel. The husband of Luci."

"It will be done."

Again the silence, and the hostile stars, and the sense that Parizianski was somewhere near and getting nearer; Martel felt his heart beating faster. He stole a glimpse at his chestbox and set his heart down a point. He felt calmer, even though he had not been able to scan with care.

The voice this time was cheerful, as though an annoyance had been settled: "Adam Stone consents to see you. Enter Chief Downport, and welcome."

The little sphere dropped noiselessly to the ground and the wire whispered away into the darkness. A bright arc of narrow light rose from the ground in front of Martel and swept through the city to one of the higher towers—apparently a hostel, which Martel had never entered. Martel plucked his aircoat to his chest for ballast, stepped heel-and-toe on the beam, and felt himself whistle through the air to an entrance window which sprang up before him as suddenly as a devouring mouth.

A tower guard stood in the doorway. "You are awaited, sir. Do you bear weapons; sir?"

"None." said Martel, grateful that he was relying on his own strength.

The guard let him past the check-screen. Martel noticed the quick flight of a warning across the screen as his instruments registered and identified him as a Scanner. But the guard had not noticed it.

The guard stopped at a door. "Adam Stone is armed. He is lawfully armed by authority of the Instrumentality and by the liberty of this city. All those who enter are given warning."

Martel nodded in understanding at the man and went in.

Adam Stone was a short man, stout and benign. His grey hair rose stiffly from a low forehead. His whole face was red and merry looking. He looked like a jolly guide from the Pleasure Gallery, not like a man who had been at the edge of the Up-and-Out, fighting the Great Pain without haberman protection.

He stared at Martel. His look was puzzled, perhaps a little annoyed, but not hostile.

Martel came to the point. "You do not know me. I lied. My name is Martel, and I mean you no harm. But I lied. I beg the Honorable gift of your hospitality. Remain armed. Direct your weapon against me—"

Stone smiled: "I am doing so," and Martel noticed the small Wirepoint in Stone's capable plump hand.

"Good. Keep on guard against me. It will give you confidence in what I shall say. But do, I beg you, give us a screen of privacy. I want no casual lookers. This is a matter of life and death."

"First: whose life and death?" Stone's face remained calm, his voice even.

"Yours, and mine, and the worlds'."

"You are cryptic but I agree." Stone called through the doorway: "Privacy please." There was a sudden hum, and all the little noises of the night quickly vanished from the air of the room.

Said Adam Stone: "Sir, who are you? What brings you here?"

"I am Scanner Thirty-four."

"You a Scanner. I don't believe it."

For answer, Martel pulled his jacket open, showing his chestbox. Stone looked up at him, amazed. Martel explained:

"I am crunched. Have you never seen it before?"

"*Not with men.* On animals. Amazing! But—what do you want?"

"The truth. Do you fear me?"

"Not with this," said Stone, grasping the Wirepoint.
"But I shall tell you the truth."

"Is it true that you have conquered the Great Pain?"

Stone hesitated, seeking words for an answer.

"Quick, can you tell me how you have done it, so that I may believe you?"

"I have loaded the ships with life."

"Life?"

"Life. I don't know what the great pain is, but I did find that in the experiments, when I sent out masses of animals or plants, the life in the center of the mass lived longest. I built ships—small ones, of course—and sent them out with rabbits, with monkeys—"

"Those are Beasts?"

"Yes. With small Beasts. And the Beasts came back unhurt. They came back because the walls of the ships were filled with life. I tried many kinds, and finally found a sort of life which lives in the waters. Oysters. Oyster-beds. The outermost oyster died in the Great Pain. The inner ones lived. The passengers were unhurt."

"But they were Beasts?"

"Not only Beasts. Myself."

"You!"

"I came through Space alone. Through what you call the Up-and-Out, alone. Awake and sleeping. I am unhurt. If you do not believe me, ask your brother Scanners. Come and see my ship in the morning. I will be glad to see you then, along with your brother Scanners. I am going to demonstrate before the Chiefs of the Instrumentality."

GOLDFISH BOWL

BY ALFRED J. COPPEL, JR.

"BEFORE you leave for the field, Paul," said Pamela Marshall, "I wish you would speak to Cassie about those goldfish."

Paul Marshall, his head spinning with facts and figures concerning vanishing rockets, gulped his last swallow of coffee and nodded vaguely. He glanced out of the kitchenette window toward the low concrete buildings of the Experimental Station some three miles away. The sun was just coming over the eastern hills, and the squat, functional buildings of the station cast oddly long and graceful shadows over the desert terrain.

Even at this distance, Marshall could make out the black and yellow squares on the trim shapes of the three V-2s that stood in the launching racks. And, farther on, the candy-striped colossus, AN-ES-Two...Army-Navy Experimental Spaceship Two...more familiarly known around the station as "Wandering Boy"...reared its gaudy bulk against the sky.

Paul could not help a twinge of uneasiness looking at the empty framework that only a month ago had held "Wandering Boy's" twin. For it was gone, and its pilot with it. Where were they now, wondered Marshall? Eighteen tons of steel and dural and human flesh could not disappear without a trace into a cloudless sky...yet

it had. Nor could the rocket have slipped from Earth's gravitation to plunge on out into the vastnesses of the interplanetary deeps. The ES series of rockets could not develop the necessary seven-mile-per-second velocity. They had been designed only to carry one man to the four hundred mile level and return. . .by parachute. . .after their velocity was spent in a "grazing elipse." It was all so beautifully simple. These were the first faltering steps on the road to the stars. It sounded wonderful that way. But Number One had taken off a month ago. . .and vanished.

What goes up must come down. Sure. That's what technicians had been saying ever since Newton's apple. And maybe Number One had landed in some uncharted wilderness. Maybe in the ocean. That was all right with Marshall. Such things were occupational risks for a test pilot on rocket research. But the telescopes and radar of half the world. . .and surely the Russian half, too. . .had followed Number One up to the three hundred mile mark. No one saw it come down. Number Two would go soon. . .and Paul Marshall with it. And there was an eeriness to Number One's demise that had him throughly frightened.

"Paul, are you listening to me?"

"What? Oh, sure, Pam. What is it?" Marshall smiled absently at his wife, only half conscious of her crisp loveliness. Pamela was leaning across the table, a frown creasing her smooth forehead. She knew nothing of the troubles at the field. The disappearance of the first man-carrying rocket was top-secret.

"I said I want you to speak to Cassie about those fish."

"Fish?"

"Those awful goldfish that old bird Professor Millard brought her last winter."

Paul Marshall was finding it hard to concentrate on goldfish, but he did recall that the old professor had brought Cassie some very repulsive specimens from his personal aquarium. By now they were scaly, and full of scars from their incessant fighting in the tiny bowl. And they daily grew larger and more fractious. "Okay, Pam," said Marshall, "Where is she?"

Pam indicated the bathroom door. The sound of water splashing told of seven year old Cassie's morning ablutions. Presently, the noises stopped, and Cassie appeared in the doorway. She was still rubbing her eyes sleepily, for it wasn't easy for her to rise with the sun. Still the station's elementary school bus came by the bungalow only once, and Cassie was proudly in the second grade.

Paul Marshall watched his daughter with fondly tolerant eyes as she climbed tumultuously into her chair.

"Morning-daddy-morning-mommie." She ran all her words together.

Marshall stood up and kissed her on the forehead. "Good morning, Cassie," he said. Then he started for the door and his waiting jeep.

"Paul." Pamela's voice was quietly exasperated. "The fish?"

"Of course, dear." He turned toward Cassie purposefully. He rather dreaded laying down the law to his daughter. Children were such little savages, one could never tell just how they would react.

"Cassandra," he began.

Cassie sat quite still, her hands primly folded in her lap. She knew something unpleasant was in store when either of her parents used her full name.

"Cassandra, your mother wants you to get rid of the goldfish."

Pamela rushed to his aid to forestall the expected out-

break. "They are getting much too big for that little bowl, and there's not a larger one within two hundred miles of here. Its a cruelty to keep them like that. And yesterday one of them tried to jump out and splashed water all over the dining-room table." And as a clincher, she added: "They are old and ugly and I don't want them in the house!"

Paul thought that rather unpleasant of Pam, but Cassie was surprisingly not upset. She had been afraid her parents had found out about the snake she had in a shoe-box in the back yard, or the jack-rabbit that Captain O'Donnell had trapped for her. With immature wisdom, Cassie weighed the snake and the rabbit against the fish and made her decision.

"All right, Mommy," she smiled, "They're ugly ol' things, anyway. Just throw them away."

Pamela, left rather breathless by the speed of her victory, turned to busy herself with the preparation of her daughter's breakfast.

"That's a good girl, Cassie," was all she could find to say. But Paul wanted to be more certain that he wasn't doing something wrong. He took his fatherhood seriously; and he had read a book on child psychology once.

"You're sure you don't mind, Cassie?" he asked.

Cassie shook her head and set her amber curls dancing. "I don't mind, daddy. I'm tired of the ol' fish anyway. They're a *noo*-sance." She smiled, proud of her new word.

Paul agreed heartily about the fish being a nuisance, but he shook his head in bewilderment at the labyrinthine workings of the young mind. He reflected that he had been quite right to think of children as little savages. True enough, the fish were only playthings. . .but it took

a truly immature mind to be so completely calloused where life was concerned; even the life of so poor a creature as a fish. But Cassie was. . . well, Cassie. And the "ol' fish" were only. . . fish. So. . . Paul shrugged mentally. . . so, exit fish. It was as simple as that.

The V-2 left a jagged trail of white smoke as it vanished into the cloudless desert sky.

From the dome of the radar tower, Paul Marshall watched it go, and when he could no longer see it, he turned to watch the pip on the ground glass of the radar. It climbed steadily toward the three hundred mile level.

"Will it get up there?" he asked O'Donnell.

The Irish captain nodded in reply. "It should," he said. "With the improvements our people have made in the original German motors, this V-2 should have almost the same range as your 'wandering boy'."

"Or Number One?" Marshall could not keep the edge off his voice.

"We'll lick it, Paul," declared the officer confidently.

"In time, maybe," returned Marshall sourly, "But 'Wandering Boy' goes up within a few days now. I'm just wondering who is going to do the actual licking on this deal. It begins to look like yours truly. . . period!"

The V-2 soared higher into the ionosphere. "Two fifty." intoned the WAC at the control panel.

"So far so good," beamed O'Donnell.

Marshall grunted drily.

"Two seventy five."

The pip was still there, a bright point of yellow light on the dull greyneess of the ground glass screen. O'Donnell was pleased as he turned to face the test pilot.

"There, you see? She's starting down now. As soon as we recover the warhead, we can complete the preparations for firing Number Two. There's nothing out of

the ordinary up there. . ."

Marshall was far from convinced. "Remember, I have a wife and child to think about, O'Donnell. Your just saying that there isn't anything dangerous up there isn't enough. What about Number One?"

Captain O'Donnell frowned. "An accident pure and simple. The can must have exploded and come down in fragments too fine for our stuff here to pick up and register."

"Then, why no meteors?" demanded Marshall.

"Damnation, man! What do I know from meteors? I'm only personnel officer here." He looked hard at Marshall. "If you've lost your nerve, I can take care of that and locate another man. That is part of my job. And there are a dozen test pilots that will jump at the chance, you know. But if you just want explanations about what happened to Number One, you had better take it up with the Astrophysics people. They're the brain-trust around here. . ."

He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, not taking his eyes from the test pilot's face.

"Well, what about it, Marshall? Have you lost your belly for this deal? If you have, say so now. I have to know. It will take me a week or so to screen out another man to take over Number Two."

"Well," thought Marshall, "how about it, blue flame? Have you lost your nerve?" It wasn't a happy sort of self-examination. The loss of the first rocket had frightened him badly, there was no shame in admitting it. After all, this was hardly an ordinary testing job. And it was no job for a man with a family. But. . .

There was the money to think of. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars guaranteed. Tax free. And if something happened. The money would be there in trust

for Pam and Cassie. He couldn't even think of that kind of money in ordinary test work. Airplanes were simply too safe now. And that kind of money would assure the future for Pam and Cassie. He was actually worth as much dead as alive. So the family angle wasn't really valid.

And there was the job itself. The feeling of being a pioneer of spaceflight. That had been his real incentive in the first place when he had taken the work over Pam's objections. The race was on the upgrade. When the first rocket landed on the Moon, he wanted to be able to say: "I helped." That was important. Could he expect such a reward without comensurate risk? The answer was no,

"You don't have to worry about another pilot, O'Donnell," he said in a low voice. "I can handle it."

The beaming smile returned to the officer's face. He slapped Marshall on the back. "Good! I knew you would never let me down. Now...what about a cup of coffee at the PX? Ten o'clock. Coffee time."

Together they left the radar tower, and the WAC closed down the set, her face immobile. Above her, the desert sky shown with a brassy blankness. She looked up...and looked away quickly, shuddering at she knew not what...

* * *

Exactly one week to the hour later, Paul Marshall settled himself into the spring harness within the tapering shell of "Wandering Boy."

He was glad he hadn't told Pam or Cassie that today was the day for the test. Pam would worry. And Cassie...so sweet and young. It wasn't easy to be a pioneer, he thought wryly.

He lay prone in the nose of the rocket, his body parallel

to the longitudinal axis. That would mean blackout on takeoff, for the ascent would be nearly vertical. If anything went wrong on takeoff, then...he wouldn't know it. It wasn't a comforting thought.

There was a click as the valve closed behind him. He lay still, waiting tensely for the firing signal from the tower. He was acutely conscious of the thin-walled tanks that kept the highly volatile monoatomic hydrogen and the icily cold liquid oxygen separated in the tangled mass of wiring and plumbing behind him. There was little danger of explosion...but that monoatomic hydrogen was risky stuff. He thought of it, and his heart seemed to swell up into a position immediately under his larynx. He felt very like a man waiting to be shot from a carnival cannon. Only this would be a *real* ride!

For the third time, he re-checked the G-suit connections, the fittings of his stratosuit, the bail-out oxygen bottles clipped to his legs, the two parachutes on his back and chest.

A red light lighted on the control panel before him. Forty seconds to go. Then the blackout. The G-suit would help, of course, but "Wandering Boy" would leap skyward at four gravities...and the lights would go out very quickly. He couldn't expect to see anything but sky, but he rubbed a gloved hand across the steamy port. It was nice to see the outside.

Questions. A thousand questions! They spun in crazy circles in his head.

Would the close confines of the rocket bring claustrophobia? The takeoff...would it hurt? Would the terrible emptiness of the ionosphere bring agorophobia? And...

What happened to Number One? What?

A voice from the control tower sounded metallicly in his headset.

"Twenty five seconds, Marshall."

He responded automatically. "Roger, tower."

Now the questions were a hundred piercing voices shrieking in his ears. Will this tin-can hold together? Can I get out of it if it doesn't? Visions of Pam's softly rounded body and her piquant face floated before his eyes. And Cassie shouting over and over again: "Throw the fish away, daddy! Throw the fish away!" Crazily, without rhyme or reason. He knew then how terribly afraid he really was.

"Ten seconds."

His gloved hand rested on the firing control, muscles trembling as he fought with his fear.

"FIRE!"

His hand jerked instinctively. A hissing roar. The tightness of the G-suit banging hard against his solar plexus. The sudden heaviness of his head, driving his neck painfully down into his collarbone. Greyness, like a fine wire mesh being drawn over his eyes. Then black-out. . .

The gaudy shape rose from the field on a pillar of fire. Like a hundred or more V-2s before it it left its jagged streak of smoke and condensing water vapor in the dusty air and vanished. . .straight up. Outrunning its own sound and the very tortured shrieking of the rent air at its nose, "Wandering Boy" climbed out of the bright warm air of New Mexico into a cold, blue-black, world of silence and unwinking stars. At two hundred miles, the land below had lost identity, mountains and oceans leveling out into a flat, murky, plain. Far to the west, the sun's rays reflected through the mistiness to mark the great, curving surface of the Pacific ocean. To the east and south, the Gulf lay leaden, denied the failing afternoon light by the distance. And the sky was jewel-studded sable. At two

swelling curvature of the planet's great bulk. The rocket climbed higher. Now height had no meaning. It became hundred and fifty miles, the rocket motors still lashed the attenuated atmosphere. . .

At three hundred miles, the flame spouting from the tail of the rocket flickered and died, but still the projectile surged upward, driven inexorably on by its own momentum.

Fifty miles higher, and it was slowing. Marshall lay watching the splendor of Creation in openmouthed wonder. His fear was forgotten in the midst of such incredible beauty. To his right, the sun blazed in corruscating glory. Below, and slipping from behind the green disc of Earth, the crescent Moon added its beauty to the day-night of outer space.

Four hundred miles. The rocket, spent, poised for the breathless plunge back to the world of reality. Then. . .

The rocket vanished. And where it had been, a silvery scintillating dust hung in the airless dark. . .

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"Teev!"

The mental cry echoed through the fabric of the continuum. There was annoyance in the thoughts that comprised it.

Teev flowed through spaces and dimensions, and presently she was with her Life-giver. The mental energy that was her Lord was nearby, too. Teev composed herself and waited.

Her Life-giver did not speak. But her Lord flowed from behind a small, ornamental, star and directed his thoughts at her. Teev was uneasy. It was not generally her Lord's way to bother with the immature. This, surely, was the Life-giver's doing.

"Teev. Your Life-giver wants you to get rid of the Humans."

The Life-giver hastened to take her stand. "They are too big for their bowl now," she declared, "And they keep running into the Barrier. This last one that tried to jump out scattered protoplasmic sub-life all over two quadrants of space. It's a cruelty to keep them like that." And, illogically, she added: "They are quarrelsome and ugly, and I don't want them around."

Teev quickly weighed the Humans against the War-lecks and the Spintrians that she had hidden across the Galaxy. She made her decision.

"Very, well, Life-giver. They are ugly old things, anyway. Just destroy them all."

The Life-giver glowed satisfaction. "Thank you, Teev," she said, "Now go along and amuse yourself."

"Wait, Teev," her Lord called. He was a trifle uneasy. Teev was his favorite Young One, and he did not want to hurt her. He took his parenthood very seriously.

"Are you certain you don't mind, Teev?"

"Oh, no, my Lord. I'm tired of watching over them, anyway. They're a nuisance."

The Lord agreed heartily about the Humans being a nuisance with their everlasting quarrelsomeness, but he remained deep in thought long after Teev had wandered off to visit the Second Galaxy. So often he had thought of the Young Ones as little savages. And rightly so. True, enough, the Humans were only Teev's playthings, but it took the labyrinthine workings of the truly immature mind to be so calloused where life was concerned; even the life of so poor a creature as a human. But Teev was. . .well, Teev. And the Humans were only. . .Humans. So. . .Teev's Lord shrugged mentally. . .so exit Humans.

And it was as simple as that.

Martel repeated his question: "You came here alone?"

Adam Stone grew testy: "Yes, alone. Go back and check your Scanner's register if you do not believe me. You never put me in a bottle to cross space."

Martel's face was radiant. "I believe you now. It is true. No more Scanners. No more habermans. No more cranching."

Stone looked significantly toward the door.

Martel did not take the hint. "I must tell you that—"

"Sir, tell me in the morning. Go enjoy your cranch. Isn't it supposed to be pleasure? Medically I know it well. But not in practice."

"It is pleasure. It's normality—for a while. But listen. The Scanners have sworn to destroy you, and your work."

"What!"

"They have met and have voted and sworn. You will make Scanners unnecessary, they say. You will bring the Ancient Wars back to the world, if Scanning is lost and the Scanners live in vain!"

Adam Stone was nervous but kept his wits about him: "You're a Scanner. Are you going to kill me—or try?"

"No, you fool. I have betrayed the Confraternity. Call guards the moment I escape. Keep guards around you. I will try to intercept the killer."

Martel saw a blur in the window. Before Stone could turn, the Wirepoint was whipped out of his hand. The blur solidified and took form as Parizianski.

Martel recognized what Parizianski was doing: *High speed*.

Without thinking of his cranch, he thrust his hand to his chest, set himself up to *High speed* too. Waves of fire, like the Great Pain, but hotter, flooded over him. He fought to keep his face readable as he stepped in front of

ing—hearing the sound of her happy weeping, the sound of her chest as she caught the air back into her throat.

He spoke weakly: "Still crunched? Alive?"

Another face swam into the blur beside Luci's. It was Adam Stone. His deep voice rang across immensities of space before coming to Martel's hearing. Martel tried to read Stone's lips, but could not make them out. He went back to listening to the voice:

"...not crunched. Do you understand me? Not crunched!"

Martel tried to say: "But I can hear! I can feel!" The others got his sense if not his words.

Adam Stone spoke again:

"You have gone back through the Haberman. I put you back first. I didn't know how it would work in practice, but I had the theory all worked out. You don't think the Instrumentality would waste the the Scanners, do you? You go back to normality. We are letting the habermans die as fast as the ships come in. They don't need to live any more. But we are restoring the Scanners. You are the first. Do you understand? You are the first. Take it easy, now."

Adam Stone smiled. Dimly behind Stone, Martel thought that he saw the face of one of the Chiefs of the Instrumentality. That face, too, smiled at him, and then both faces disappeared upward and away.

Martel tried to lift his head, to scan himself. He could not. Luci stared at him, calming herself, but with an expression of loving perplexity. She said,

"My darling husband! You're back again, to stay!"

Still, Martel tried to see his box. Finally he swept his hand across his chest with a clumsy motion. There was nothing there. The instruments were gone. He was back to normality but still alive.

In the deep weak peacefulness of his mind, another troubling thought took shape. He tried to write with his finger, the way that Luci wanted him to, but he had neither pointed fingernail nor Scanner's Tablet. He had to use his voice. He summoned up his strength and whispered:

"Scanners?"

"Yes, darling? What is it?"

"Scanners?"

"Scanners. Oh, yes, darling, they're all right. They had to arrest some of them for going into *High Speed* and running away. But the Instrumentality caught them all—all those on the ground—and they're happy now. Do you know, darling," she laughed, "some of them didn't want to be restored to normality. But Stone and his Chiefs persuaded them."

"Vomact?"

"He's fine, too. He's staying crunched until he can be restored. Do you know, he has arranged for Scanners to take new jobs. You're all to be Deputy Chiefs for Space. Isn't that nice? But he got himself made Chief for Space. You're all going to be pilots, so that your fraternity and guild can go on. And Chang's getting changed right now. You'll see him soon."

Her face turned sad. She looked at him earnestly and said: "I might as well tell you now. You'll worry otherwise. There has been one accident. Only one. When you and your friend called on Adam Stone, your friend was so happy that he forgot to scan, and he let himself die of *Overload*."

"Called on Stone?"

"Yes. Don't you remember? Your friend."

He still looked surprised, so she said:

"Parizianski."

POWER FOR DARM

BY BASIL WELLS

THE BROWN-SMOCKED YOUNG MAN AROSE FROM HIS SEAT ON THE hewn stone of the fence and stretched his long muscular limbs impatiently. His nervous fingers found the pale white limb of a flowering shrub and broke it, the yellowish spurting sap staining his hand.

"I have come to love Darm," he announced abruptly, a frown growing as his eyes ranged further afield.

"For a year I have lived here with you, luxuriating in this paradise of green plains, cool mountains, and broad seas." He paused and his fists knotted at his hips.

"Earth must have been like this ages ago—before her hills were gutted of metal and her seas dried up forever."

The round-bellied stubby peasant with the square golden beard paused in his sniffing of aromatic smoke from a hand-held bowl. He nodded.

"So," he agreed, "a year it is. And a most profitable year for the both of us, Jem Thyrne. The tools we made from your wrecked sky ship now make us wealthy."

"Zar Welk," said the Earthman, pulling savagely at the hollow stem that ran from his own smaller smelling bowl to his mouth, "I must go to the city of your ruler. I must win for myself power and wealth. Only thus can I help Darm to grow strong."

The peasant's oddly slanted purplish eyes narrowed questioningly.

"Why need you go there?" he inquired. "Have I not shared with you the profits of the metal-edged plows and shovels? Have not our four-wheeled wagons and our sharp axes made large

profits? Soon you will have *atons* aplenty to buy an estate and be a noble.

"And my daughter, Flora, is. . ."

"You do not understand, Zar Welk," cried Thyrne angrily. The shredded bloodweed in his hand-carved pipe spat smoke. "There will be other spacers landing here on Darm. The Tyrants, my friend, are not men like you or I. They are mutant creatures, great-brained scientists with puny bodies and vestigial limbs. And they are searching for a new system of planets. . . Planets like Darm!

"Venus, Earth, Mars—even the moons of Jove and Saturn—are milked dry of metals and chemicals. Our sun is dying. The Tyrants plan to leave our wornout worlds and migrate elsewhere. They will enslave them, even as my own people are enslaved.

"That is why I must gain power; that is why I must bring civilization to Darm—so the Tyrants cannot come to rule over your broad continents and seas!"

Zar Welk shook his head. "In your speech there is much of mystery and symbolism. Even yet I cannot believe but that the gods have sent you from their distant abode. This Earth of which you speak, and the Tyrants, must be the titles of evil gods and their joyless abode."

Jem Thyrne shrugged his broad shoulders. What could you say to men of so primitive a culture as this of Darm? For the moment the colossal concept of bringing civilization to an entire planet staggered even his educated brain. And then he laughed. Even the impossible must be overcome. The emotionless mutants, the Tyrants must not conquer this world. Somewhere in all these whirling galaxies there must be one world where a spark of freedom went on burning.

"I must go to the seaport city of Cramar, your ruler," he said doggedly. "I must convince Cramar that his nation needs the technical knowledge I can offer. I must build an industrial empire that even the Tyrants' space fleets cannot overcome."

And Jem Thyrne strode gloomily away across the close-chewed grass below Zar Welk's thatched oval dwelling to the tree-shadowed brook crossing the hilly pasture land. . .

Thyrne kicked thoughtfully at the fallen log below the rock where he sat. Red-scaled fish darted through the clear water of the rocky pool before him, and beyond the stream the cowlike,

shaggy-hided brown *mualds* stopped their grazing to watch him.

The Earthman shied a bit of rock at the *mualds* and they went galloping awkwardly away, their oddly humped backs awaying and their milk-heavy bags jouncing from side to side. Thyrne chuckled.

"Cross-bows—they have them already," he muttered. "Telephones, flashlights, guns—all smack too much of witchcraft. I'd end up baking inside a witch-ball of leaves and mud like those two poor old hags in the village."

He shot a quick flash of sight at the position of the twin suns of Darm. Almost evening.

"And yet I must have an unusual and useful gift for the Great Cramar. The emperor of Noor must be amused before he listens." Thyrne sighed.

"A printing press would be useless in a medieval world like this where the ruling class is not interested in learning. Motors are out, even steam engines—I haven't enough atons. And sailing craft, by the same reasoning are out. Masts and sails would take all my earnings and more."

"Why not take to the Great Cramar models of the plows and tools you made for my father?" a mellow low-toned voice asked.

Thyrne turned to look into the smiling purple eyes of Fora, Zar Welk's youngest daughter. She wore a simple tunic of pale blue zinna fiber, and her long sun-fired golden hair was bound with a simple band of braided leather for a fillet. She was lovely.

The Earthman pulled her down beside him on the rock and kissed her. For some time now he had known that Fora loved him, the women of Darm were outspoken in such matters, and Thyrne felt an equal affection for the tiny peasant girl. Yet he did not agree to her repeated requests, after the manner of Darm, that they be betrothed. There would be no time for love or children in the years ahead.

"Rulers do not wish the tillers of the soil to prosper," he said thoughtfully. When peasants grow wealthy and strong they are not obedient. Cramar would not be pleased to learn that now ten men can do the work of a hundred."

"Yet your machines will help the peasants!" cried the girl. "You said that with the coming of machines and better tools men would not have to toil from dawn until dusk—or did you tell lies to my father?"

"That will be true," agreed Thyrne. "Only the king will not

know all of my plans until I have won the power I need."

The face of Fora was thoughtful. She fingered the leather lacing that bound the open neck of her tunic-like dress. Thyrne's eyes lighted suddenly as they watched her fingers.

"I have it!" he cried eagerly. "A slide fastener for the royal garments! Make a tape of dressed leather and use copper for the hooks. . . Cut out U-shaped section of the metal and make simple dies to form the pockets at the crotch. . . Experiment will show the proper distance each metal hook must be placed apart to form a solid chain. . . Easy enough to make a slider to pull them together."

"Jem," said the girl hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Promise that you will not tell Cramar or his nobles that you know us. Do not mention our names. And take another name yourself."

Thyrne frowned. "But I want you to come to me, all of you, when I begin building my industrial empire here on Darm."

"Promise," said Fora.

"I promise," agreed the Earthman.

The way from the tiny village high up in the mountain valleys of the Kaz Mountains to Mur, capitol of the kingdom of Noor, was long. Jem Thyrne had rode great logs of the forested foothills, bound into huge rafts by the brawny brown-skinned men of the river, ever downward toward western seaport of Dond on the Sea of Moln. He had left the rafts when the huge logs were poled into the backwaters of Dond Bay and bought a long-limbed *stod*, the cloven-hoofed mount of the men of temperate Darm.

And he had ridden for a hundred miles across the barren plateau that separated the Sea of Moln from the Sea of Silver Weeds and the great gulf where the city of Mur was placed. Desert beasts had come from the dust clouds, their armor-plated bodies shielding them from all but the most accurate sword thrust. But for his failing solar pistol, with which he crisped their ugly bodies, Thyrne must have battled for his life more than once.

So he came out upon the great knob above the river valley where the sprawling gray and brown-domed buildings of the walled seaport of Mur lay. And for long did he watch the great gray-splotched green towers where Great Cramar held sway before he sent his clean-limbed *stod* down the narrow road of rough-dressed boulders.

Another traveler, a burly gray-bearded merchant whose ten thick-legged stods bore great packs of pottery and leather goods from the ships anchored in Dond Bay, had passed Thyrne and now the Earthman came up with him again. They were friends; together they, and the three servants of the merchant, had driven off twice their number of bandits further back along the trail.

"A great city is it not, Thur Jon?" asked the trader.

"Indeed," agreed the Earthman. Inwardly he smiled at the alias he had adopted; yet he had promised the girl.

"After your business at the palace is finished," the merchant said, "come to the Trader's Cavern. It is but a few blocks from the Great Cramar's palaces."

"The Trader's Cavern," asked Thyrne, "is a hostel for tradesman and merchants?"

"Naturally," laughed the trader. "For an unemployed fighting man like yourself the rates are high, but you can share my bench tonight without charge."

"But," objected Thyrne, "I am not an unemployed—I am not a warrior."

The trader's keen blue-green eyes were piercing. "You had best be a warrior," he suggested, "looking for employment with some of Great Cramar's nobles. I am your friend, Thur Jon, and I believe your tale of coming from the mountains to visit the city of our ruler. But the galleys of Cramar need rowers, there is war with Stran far to the east, and peasant or townsman is seized without question by the captains."

Thyrne looked down at his sturdy well-worn outer tunic of tough stod hide; he looked at his two slim swords, both of their keen double-edged blades sheathed in battered leather scabbards, and he felt the comforting pressure of the stout horn-tipped bow across his back. He could indeed pass for one of the hundreds of fighting men who hired their weapons and skins to the various quarreling noblemen of Noor to carry out their bloody feuds.

"How could I have forgotten my services with the noble lords of southern Noor?" said Thyrne. "Fighting, wine, women and many silver atons in plunder—that was the life."

The trader smiled behind his great gray beard. "How convenient is such a memory," he said. "But I had best tell you something of the names and habits of those southern nobles. Your memory may yet be faulty."

And riding together they came to the great interlocking gates

of Mur and were admitted through the sunken tunnel beside it. Once within the gates they parted; Thyrne finding a stabling place for his weary black stöd, and the trader going on into the wall-darkened narrow alleys and streets of the tradespeople. . .

"All the afternoon," argued Thyrne as meekly as his earth blood would permit, "have I waited for some word from the Great Cramar. He has not acknowledged the gift that I sent with the messenger, nor has my message that I know many other valuable inventions been answered."

The hawk-faced skeleton in the shabby green-spotted scarlet robes snarled up at Thyrne from the desk where he sat writing. This was as far as Thyrne had come, here to the mean cellar chamber of an assistant record keeper to the third record keeper of the Great Cramar's household expenses. And even here five precious atons had been placed in the bony man's fleshless palm before he consented to carry the gift and the message on to Great Cramar's secretary, Lord Rud Toln.

"Another word," the record keeper growled, "and the king's guards will strip the tunic from your filthy back, warrior, and bloody that stiff-boned back with their heels."

Jem Thyrne's hand went down angrily to his sword and the faded sallowness of the man's narrow face sucked dry of blood with the gesture. He cowered low in his uncomfortable chair of plaited bark and reeds, ashly pallor knotting at his drawn features.

Thyrne smiled thinly. "Tomorrow," he said, "I will be back. See that I have some answer from the secretary to Great Cramar."

The skeleton head ducked in humble agreement as Thyrne turned toward the outer door.

A clanking of armor came from the corridor beyond the humble clerk's rude desk. A red-whiskered man-at-arms, his weapon a big-headed axe with a colorfully ribboned staff for its handle, led five other metal-bosomed guardsmen into the dampness of the chamber.

"Phfoow," snorted the red-whiskered one, "a slimy den for a slimy lizard." He allowed a meaty palm to crack smartly against the quivering boniness of the clerk's cheek. "Cowardly lizards too," he roared in sudden good humor, "they breed underground."

Abruptly his hot blue eyes transfixed the wavering gaze of the trembling keeper of accounts.

"Where," he demanded, "is the warrior, or perhaps it is the

warlock, who sent the sliding thing of metal to Rud Toln?"

Before the clerk could speak Thyrne stepped forward.

"The sliding fastener," he explained, "was sent to Great Cramar."

The blue eyes flared. "Come along," the soldier ordered. "Rud Toln wishes to see you."

Thyrne felt his blood pound with new hope. Once he spoke with Rud Toln and then with the king he was on the way to the power he must acquire if Darm was to remain free. He went with the soldiers gladly up the corridor and the ramp to Rud Toln's quarters.

The great, metal-bound door swung wide and Thyrne looked across a broad expanse of unevenly stone-flagged floor to the ornately-carved desk where Great Cramar's secretary sat. His eyes widened as he saw the snowy-haired foppish little man who pursed pouting bluish lips at his approach.

"You are Thur Jon?" the man's oddly deep voice boomed.

Thyrne remembered to drop to his left knee and strike it lightly with his right fist in the approved fashion of peasantry and the lower classes of Noor.

"Yes, your brilliance," he assented.

"Give thanks to the gods that be, then," said the little man's great voice, "that your demon-fashioned gift fell into my hands rather than into those of Cramar. You would have been bundled into a witch-ball within the hour and slowly roasted."

The Earthman kept his silence. There was something here he did not understand. His gift had been purposely simple.

"Instead," Rud Toln went on, "I am merely putting you into a hidden prison where I can watch your actions. Perhaps I am also interested in the doings of demon-haunted men—that I may better combat them."

Thyrne understood suddenly. The slide fastener would go to Great Cramar of course, only Rud Toln would claim to be its inventor. In the secret prison, with a torture chamber annex Thyrne could well believe, those other inventions he had mentioned would also be wormed from his sweating brain. And Rud Toln would grow wealthy and gain more honors.

For a brief instant Thyrne found himself half-believing that the men of Darm deserved the slavery the Tyrants might force upon them. Then he realized that though these men of the royal palaces were scheming rascals the great rank and file of Darmites were not.

The solar pistol fitted itself into his fist comfortably as he backed toward the door. That this was a trap he now realized, but the blast of the unleashed solar rays could easily clear a path through the waiting guardsmen.

"Seize him," ordered Rud Toln coolly.

The solar pistol spurted incinerating destruction. Four of the guards went down in that first blast. The other two fled, the red whiskered soldier bounding far ahead of his comrade. Thyrne turned again toward the secretary to Great Cramar. He realized now that this present quest for an audience with the ruler of Noor was hopeless. But before he left Rud Toln's treachery would be punished.

He depressed the worn firing stud and a shaft of ravening heat lashed out—only to fall short! Panic gripped the Earthman. The stored-up energy of his weapon had been exhausted.

Instantly he spun from the room and went racing down the corridor toward the outer palace gateway. The clank of armor, the thud of running sandaled feet, and the shouts of hastily organized squads of men told him that he was fleeing none too soon. He passed the gape-mouthed clerk and darted through the opposite doorway. . .

Into the midst of a little knot of four excited swordsmen!

Then both Thyrne's swords went into play and before they had recovered from their amazement at this madman's materialization in their midst, three went down, wounded. The remaining guardsman battled valiantly but he was a grizzled oldster, and slow, and a moment later Thyrne was gone through the outer gateway while the guard stared dolefully down at the sword-pierced elbow leaking blood over his groaning fellows.

Thyrne ran across the great stone flags of the broad courtyard that entirely surrounded the royal palaces. It seemed to him that never would he reach the safety of the city's twisting narrow ways. Arrows slashed the air aside all about him, and one pierced through the thick leather of his jerkin to bury itself in the muscles of his neck. The arrow he tore out and stuffed a scrap of his tunic into the gash even as he ran.

Then the welcome shadows of the filthy streets were about him. He raced through alleys and between the rough-dressed walls of buildings for what seemed like hours. The neck wound was throbbing but so was his head. He knew that he staggered as he ran.

And he wondered why the police of the city did not attempt to halt him.

An old woman beckoned to him from the vacant window of a street level single-storied ruin. Decayed and crumbling it was, sitting there in its filthy sunken plot with the weeds and brush of neglect creeping up around it. The roof was level with the street as he trotted painfully along beside it and suddenly he decided that the old hag could mean no harm. She thought him perhaps an escaping thief.

So he sprang across the intervening six or seven feet to the flatness of the ancient roof. The roof fell away beneath him and he plunged in a welter of rotten beams and squares of thin roof-stones to the building's water-slimed floor.

"Come," whispered the old crone, taking his hand. "The sea captains'll not be taking you to row their boats like they did my son. Many a likely lad I've saved from that ugly death!"

Thyrne could only gasp out his thanks before a section of the wall slid inward before the old woman's shove and she had dragged him through into a moisture-beaded tunnel that ran knee-deep with crawling sluggish ooze.

For how long they sloshed along through the stale blackness of the underground drains Thyrne would never know. At first the stench of the walled tunnels sickened the Earthman but eventually his senses blunted and he plodded wearily along, the slimy mud squelching and gurgling underfoot with every step.

There came a time when the way clinibed and his feet no longer sucked with every step, and then the chill blackness of night air struck like cool wine into the fever of his brain.

"You are beyond the city's walls," the old woman whispered. "Go hide among the peasants along the sea or in the mountains. The gods go with you, stranger."

"Wait!" Thyrne cried. "You must live, old woman, to save other men. Take this."

And into her hand he emptied the seven little silver atons that were his only wealth. The old woman cackled her appreciation, and blessed him. Then she melted into the darkness again.

Thyrne groped along the winding creek into which the sewers of rock-walled Mur emptied until he came to a small brook that joined the larger stream. This stream he followed until he found a dense thicket of water-rooted trees, not unlike willows, and there

he stopped to wash the foulness and stench from his tunic and leather jerkin.

The four tiny moons of Darm came marching in close order above the horizon as he finished his task, and so the Earthman decided that he had best leave the city walls far behind. The weird light of the four swift-rushing satellites would show him the path eastward again across the barren plateau.

He walked as long as the moons were above the horizon and then he found a dense thicket of barbed berry canes and brush. There he lay down to sleep at last. . .

With morning he was off again, skirting the highroad where mounted soldiers, and tradesmen or peasants with led stods, moved. He knew that Rud Toln would have many squads of soldiers out scouring the countryside for him. If Thyrne knew the secrets of other inventions that might increase the prestige and wealth of the king's secretary the shrewd little man wanted them.

The Earthman plucked half-ripened ears of grain in the peasants' fields, and he found tame and wild trees that bowed heavy with fruit. In a field he saw where trenches had been dug and baskets heaped high with the brownish edible roots that formed the mainstay of the poorer peasants' diet. Here he helped himself, stuffing the portion of his tunic above his plain leather belt with the roots.

He would need food for the long march on foot across the plateau. With the roots to sustain him and the water from the springs along the caravan road he might reach Dond. And in Dond the king's power was weak. Even now, with the war against Stran raging, none of the petty rulers of eastern Noor had sent troops to strengthen Great Cramar.

So it was that he came to the great cliff above the valley of Mur and ascended that great barrier along a steep and little-used trail that he chanced upon. It was late in the afternoon when he again looked out over the fertile green plain of the river's mouth, walled-in as it was by the highlands where he stood and by the unscaled gray bulk of the distant Granite Cliffs to the north.

Turning at last, with angry tears drying in the hotness of his eyes before they were born, Thyrne set his sturdy sandals toward the distant domed towers and battlements of Dond.

The lone rider came between the looming sentinels of four slender sandstone columns. The caravan road wound past that welcome shade into a honeycomb of boulders before it plunged

again into the arid hell of dust and sand once more. The rider halted his westward course and climbed wearily from the saddle for a moment's respite in that little nest of shadow.

Thyrne, two days' journey now from Mur, lay silent among the boulders watching. Two bandits had ridden up a short while before and hidden their dusty stods among the boulders opposite, but they had not seen Thyrne. And now Thyrne was waiting. When they attacked the lone traveller his bow would cut them down and then their stods would be his.

His legs were weary—the desert sands of the plateau had sapped their strength—and he needed a mount.

The bandits circled the great monument of sandstone against which the rider rested. Their bared swords menaced him before he could attempt to draw his own weapon. They disarmed him quickly and started to search his gray-dusted garments.

Thyrne loosed his first arrow just as one of the outlaws cried out in amazement. "A woman!" he gasped even as the arrow buried its hardened copper point deep inside the cavity of his chest.

Again the bow bent—and splintered! The desert dryness or some defective structure of its wood had sapped its strength. Thyrne flung it aside and bounded down toward the remaining bandit, both swords out and gleaming.

The knowledge of fencing that had come down through the hoary ages of a long history of battle on Earth was combined with the trickery and training of Zar Welk in the sword arms of Thyrne. For Zar Welk had been a fighting man before he returned to his mountain farm. And so Thyrne's weapons clashed their keen bronze blades but twice with those of the outlaw before the man was down, a second mouth gaping in his bearded throat.

"Jem, Jem Thyrne!" cried a familiar voice, and he found himself holding the sobbing slim body of Fora in his arms.

"Why are you here, Fora?" he cried, shaking her.

The girl poked a trembling defiant tongue at him. "I followed you. I knew you would need help. So I brought many atons that my father did not need."

"You stole them, you mean," roared the Earthman. "Now Zar Welk will be searching for both of us. And I was coming back to marry you and live out my life a peasant. I failed."

Fora's lips trembled and tears streaked the grime of her cheeks. Thyrne hugged her and his voice softened.

"Never mind," he said. "We will return the atons to Zar Welk and perhaps he will forgive us."

The girl smiled timidly and her fingers tangled in the blackness of the Earthman's hair. After a moment he released her, turning to the bodies of the two thieves. He searched quickly.

"A few silver atons and weapons," he said, grinning, "and two saddled stods. Perhaps now my luck has changed."

But the girl was not listening. While her fingers had been busy another party of mounted men had come out of the desert to the west. Four men there were and a dozen laden pack-stods. Thyrne's hands dropped to the ridged leather hilts of his swords as he turned. If these were Great Cramar's men, under orders of scheming Rud Toln, he would go down fighting.

"Greetings, Thur Jon!" called the gray-bearded giant who rode the lead stod. And Thyrne's hands fell away from his weapons.

"Good day to you too, Reb Stor!" he answered. It was the trader who had offered to share his sleeping bench with Thyrne back in Mur. "I was sorry that I did not see you in Mur."

The trader laughed. "I fear you were much too busy escaping from the lizard who serves a great man." And he winked.

"You know, then," demanded Thyrne wonderingly.

"All Mur has heard of the daring man who escaped the white-haired lizard's trap," said Reb Stor, "and they are laughing. They have little to laugh at these days, for the tax collectors sent out by Rud Toln squeeze the last copper dadaton from them; yet they can enjoy the discomfort of the palace lizard."

"But how did you suspect. . .?"

"I saw the gift you carried for Great Cramar," said the trader. He smiled at Thyrne's startled look. "Yes, I examined it one night while you lay dreaming of the mountain slopes of Kaz."

"I have a son in the bodyguard of the king," he went on, "and so I was suspicious. Often he was required to examine the gifts and taste the food and wine before Great Cramar touched them."

"So you saw my crude zipper," said Thyrne. He shrugged. "What did you think of it?"

"Together we can make a fortune in Dond," the trader cried, "and the southern cities and villages of Noor will buy shipload upon shipload of them!"

Thyrne's heart beat yet more warmly. This was indeed his lucky day. With the backing of the trader, and his fellows, for

theirs was a closely knit guild, the growth of an industrial empire was possible. Even yet Darm might be made impregnable to the Tyrants of Earth.

"I have other inventions, Reb Stor," he said, "many of them, that far outshadow this simple closer of garments. Tools, lights that are like the sun, and message carriers faster than the wind."

"I do not wonder that Rud Toln, the king's lizard, wished to trap you," nodded the trader. "Travel with us, you and your companion, and we can talk of a partnership as we go."

"Good," Thyrne agreed, and turned to go for the two thieves' stods.

"In the name of Great Cramar," boomed a mighty voice close behind them, "have you come no farther than this?"

Thyrne and Reb Stor turned back again to the dusty highway where a half-score mounted soldiers had reined in. And Thyrne's heart dropped abruptly into what seemed an unending void as he saw the leader of the little troop. That red-whiskered face and the burly square body in its trappings of metal and leather could not be mistaken. It was the guardsman from the king's main palace!

Reb Stor went up to the man, smiling gladly and nodding.

"One of the pack animals was lame, Voran," he said. The red-haired man grunted and let his eyes roam over the little train of pack animals. He looked curiously at Fora's slight figure and then shook his head slightly as he saw Thyrne. He was startled.

"And who are the others?" he inquired, his eyes never leaving the Earthman. "Do I know them?"

Reb Stor shook his head. "No," he admitted, "but you will. This is Thur Jon and his—wife, with whom I am going into business. Thur Jon has saved my life and my train once from bandits, and now he is going to make for us much money."

The big guardsman climbed from his stod and came over to Thyrne. There was recognition in his gaze, and Thyrne tightened his hand around the grip of his right sword.

The red-whiskered man's eyelid drooped. "Glad to know you, Thur Jon," he said, and laughed.

He turned quickly and remounted. "Have to get moving," he called to the trader. "Looking for the madman who attempted to kill Rud Toln."

"Good hunting, Son," Reb Stor called after him.

"Son?" said Thyrne blankly. And then he laughed too.

"There are many of us, Thur Jon," the merchant explained between chuckles, "who feel that Great Cramar is no fit ruler for our nation. And my son is one of our most trusted agents.

"You need fear capture no longer since he is on your trail."

Thyrne eased out a great breath. He felt the depression that had oppressed his spirits for the last few days lifting. Through this friendly merchant and the wealth that his inventions would bring he might even yet save Darm from the Tyrants.

Might save Darm? . . Jem Thyrne sucked his lungs full of the dry desert air and his laughter spilled out loud and unafraid. Fora's strangely beautiful eyes smiled. It was like a caress when her eyes touched his.

Of course they would bring power to Darm! With Fora Welk, Reb Stor, and the freedom-loving men of Noor to help him they could not fail. . .

WORLD OF MISTERS

BY GENE ELLERMAN

ALAN BRUCE STAGGERED UP THE WOODED HILLSIDE. BUT A FEW hundred feet away lay the shelter tunnels that his mechanical servants had burrowed there. In those smooth-walled burrows the diz tunnelers of the revolting Cits could never trap him.

The lips of Bruce twitched with a weary smile, and his stalwart frame straightened as he thought that shortly he would be holding Isyl in his arms again—his wife, Isyl, from whose soft light hair the sunlight reflected glinting stabs of red.

His dark eyes, sunken now into the beardless oval of his bloody face, looked back over the shambles that extended hundreds of miles back toward the eastern ocean. A great swath of glassy smoothness, overlapping and ridged and pitted at intervals where the diz tunnelers' rays met, was slowly advancing. Gone were the forests and cities of the Overlords; Misters and Supers fled before the devastation that flicked solid matter into extinction noiselessly, and behind the victorious lines of the Cits women and children begged piteously for the food that civil war so ruthlessly destroyed.

A few silvery flying discs of the Overlords yet flew overhead, dropping their burdens of bombs and paralysis mines, but the surging millions of the Cits minded this destruction not a bit. It was the end.

Bruce unsteadily sucked in a lungful of air. Full realization of the disaster that had overtaken his people came upon him. The use of the diz tunnelers, with which the Overlords had probed deep into the bowels of the American continent in the endless quest for mineral wealth, had turned in their own hands and was now destroying them. All the reviving civilization brought into

flower by the scanty million men and women of the Overlords would now fall into the grimy hands of that unwashed horde down below there.

The last of the aristocratic regimes of Earth would be fallen! All the nations and continents would be ruled by the elected heads of their states! It was indeed a bitter pill for Alan Bruce, *Mister Alan Bruce*, to swallow.

Nowhere on Earth could he find refuge from the Cits. The men of Europe, Asia and Africa were heartily in accord with the aims of America's oppressed millions. For America, first home of democratic freedom, was to be the last of the erring nations to renounce her aristocratic Overlords and return to those ideals of government. America, strange paradox, last stronghold of intolerance in this the Twenty-Fifth Century!

He looked back again as the hillside leveled off under his hot shoes. The forward sweep of the wall of disintegrating rays had reached his crippled disc-ship in the valley and as he watched the ship, the trees about it, and the matted sod dissolved into nothingness. The relentless surge of the rays crept upward along the hill and Bruce knew that he could never reach the house in time.

Upon a knoll he halted. He would show these Cits how a true Overlord could die. He thrust a crested cigarette between his dry lips. His jeweled lighter flared. Defiantly he blew a blast of swirling smoke at the encroaching swallower of matter. Tall he was and handsome, his dark hair cut short upon his gleaming scarlet cape and his slitted green eyes ablaze with disdain and hatred. The diz tunnelers wormed their way inexorably forward and for a brief second orange light flooded palely about him. A surge of stabbing pain, like a billion tiny knife-thrusts, battered his body and sent him hurtling away into emptiness unending. . . .

Somewhere out in the shoreless seas of space there turned a lifeless planet. Water covered the face of the world save in one area near the equator. There was no moon that this nameless world could claim and its sun was a vast red ball pocked thick with black blotches. Perhaps the sun was dying; yet even so the great ocean that cloaked this dead planet was covered with eternal blankets of steam, and only the ragged tips of the upthrust mountain ridges near the equator rose above them.

For several days a weird rain of debris had materialized out of the empty air above the sea to the east of the mountains. Down through the clouds of steam the matter from elsewhere had plum-

meted and been swallowed up by the greedy hot sea. There were the bodies of men and women, and there were many machines intermingled with the green of grassy turf and the darkness of broken earth.

Upon some other world some mighty scientist must have been toying with forces he knew nothing about. His experiment must have run wild and the forces unleashed sent his world's surface hurtling into a weird dimensional trajectory that ended on this nameless world.

Or so it must have seemed to some vast watcher over the destinies of the galaxies who may have been watching. . . .

And finally, upon the narrow peaks and ridges of the mountains, the stream of uprooted matter flowed forward. Across the mountains the flood marched and into the misty ocean beyond!

Alan Bruce stretched out luxuriously. The sun was warm upon his face and he squinted his eyes yet tighter to shut out the glare. He heard an odd slapping sound moving somewhere farther off, a receding sound as of great feet slapping down barefooted in the mud. His brain quickened into alertness and he awoke.

He was dead!

The terrible realization that life was through—and begun again in some supernatural realm—blistered at his consciousness. He kept his lids tight shut for a moment longer fearing what he would see. Always had he scoffed at life after death; yet here it was! He was alive—and dead!

He could see a crazy nightmare of a landscape through his slitted lids. He opened his eyes fully. The field was before and about him but the hillside he had so recently climbed was as level as his front yard! He looked toward the house.

The lower floor was intact. As cleanly as though sheered off by a diz ray the lower level of his lovely gray home was left standing. He looked about but there was no sign of the upper floors. And then he saw a slight female figure in a clinging short vest and trousers of dark *fabroy* coming uncertainly toward him.

"Isyl!" he cried exultantly.

"Alan!"

"You are safe? The rays did not harm you?"

"Look about you." There was a strange awed quality in the girl's voice. "The sun is larger, older than ours."

"Dark spots," agreed Bruce, his eyes swinging slowly across the heavens and the far horizon. "Look at those peaks; at those

narrow black mesas above us—wreckage is strewn everywhere!"

"What do you think, dear?"

"Your ideas are as good as mine." Alan wrinkled his nose at her and winked. "All I know is that I am alive and with you."

"You must have some idea," Isyl smiled up at him. "Shall I tell you what you suspect?"

"Try it."

"The disintegrating rays of the Cits' army do not really destroy matter, they merely transfer it into another dimension or to another place in our own. How, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Good try, Isyl," he told her. "I agree with your theory as to our arrival. Now to more sordid matters. . . . Where are the domestics?"

"They went dead when the rays struck. All of our electrical appliances, wave-powered or wired, are useless."

"That's the trouble with robots," stormed Bruce. "I should never have replaced the Cits with them. Troublesome as our servants were, with their babble of equality and justice for all, they never failed for lack of power."

"Perhaps we can find some food in the kitchens," Isyl offered.

"I wonder. The blending of vitamins and roughage into an edible jelly or liquid is beyond my knowledge. I think we had better find some of the coarser fare that the Cits eat."

"Meat you mean?" Isyl's pert nose crinkled with disgust, "and nasty roots out of the ground?"

"Sure," Bruce said. "I've eaten their food many times when I was a boy. Used to go fishing with a Cit, boy named Erl. Never tasted any synthetics as good as that natural food."

"But—it's so unhealthy, unbalanced."

"Better get used to it, Isyl, we'll probably eat that kind of food for the rest of our lives."

Bruce reached for his holstered machine-gun. There should be a rabbit or a chicken somewhere about the tumbled slopes about them. He headed away toward a valley, where a hill had been, his eyes alert.

The valley dropped away endlessly, a yawning chasm floored with dense clouds of steam, and Bruce stepped hastily backward from the brink. This new world upon which they had been cast away was a harsh unfriendly world. Even the atmosphere seemed thicker and impure.

He followed the rim of the little rift in the grassy meadow until he came to the tangled barrier of splintered trunks, limbs and leaves that had once been a stretch of forest. To pick his way through the jumbled mass was slow work but eventually he reached the opposite side—to be confronted with a sheer black cliff that climbed steeply a thousand feet or more into the heavens. He turned to the left along the cliff, picking his way carefully through a battered jumble of boards, kitchen utensils, machinery and heaped-up mounds of brush and sod. A deserted Cit settlement had occupied approximately this same site back on Earth.

Eventually he found a small pig, trapped in a sunken hollow at the base of the cliff, and shot it. He bent down a sturdy sapling, that yet was rooted in the soil at the mangled forest's rim, and lowered himself to the dead animal's side. He felt the ground settle beneath his feet as he started climbing upward and when he again stood on solid ground he found himself looking downward into a black hole that seemed bottomless.

This new world was full of pitfalls and dangers. At every step now Bruce expected the ground to fall away beneath him. The ground was settling slowly about him as lengthening crevices in the soil attested; so he hurried back through the tangled trees to Isyl.

"Food!" he cried, dropping the bloody carcass down before Isyl's feet.

The girl drew back from the dead pig and kept her face averted while Bruce built a fire and dressed the beast. Then, as the smell of roasting meat reached her nostrils, she felt the hunger pangs growing and came to sit beside Bruce. He said nothing but gave her one of the spits to turn over the glowing coals.

The translated soil of Earth had ceased to settle into the rocky depressions of the mountain ridges and Bruce and Isyl found themselves the lords over an area comprising roughly three hundred acres of ground. Vegetation already, a week after the cataclysm that brought it to this unnamed world, grew ranker than it had ever grown in its native habitat. The air was rich in carbon dioxide, Alan decided, and the daily rains watered the soil well.

Isyl came from the ruined lower floor of their home to empty the peelings of the potatoes Bruce had brought but the day before from a weedy garden patch of some vanished Cit. She cried out

in alarm as a tall blonde giant in ragged homespun breeches and sleeveless brown jerkin stepped toward her.

"A dainty morsel," he grinned cheerfully. "I need a woman since mine died in the blasting of our huts by the Overlords' bombs."

"A Cit!" screamed Isyl. "Alan, come to me!"

"So," laughed the Cit, taking her by the arm, "trying to frighten me away." He shook the worn old shotgun he carried in his other hand. "I am not afraid of one hundred of your kind when you are unguarded by robots. You Overlords are weaklings. I can kill any of you with my fist."

"A braggart, loud of mouth as ever," a new voice broke in. "How many times must your Overlord prove to you that he is your superior?"

And Alan launched himself upon the startled Cit, his fists hammering hard upon the jaw and middle of the other.

The Cit went down with that first furious onslaught, but he rolled over, catlike, and dove at Alan's legs. Alan sidestepped and his fists hammered at the man's skull even as the stranger came to his feet. They traded blows furiously for a moment and Isyl felt a strange sense of elation surging within her as she saw that the stranger had so far suffered the greater damage.

Isyl caught sight of the compact machine-gun that had fallen from Bruce's holster and she scooped it up. Expectantly she awaited an opening so she could blast the Cit.

"You—ugh—should be—uh!" gasped the stranger, "a Cit, my friend. A—beauty of a—blow."

"Even Over—lords," Bruce gritted, "can use—umph—their fists, Erl. . . . Hey!"

Bruce batted the gun out of Isyl's hand. The Cit dropped his fists and cocked an eyebrow in her direction. He shook a grimy brown finger at the girl.

"No fair," he told her.

"How are you, Erl?" Bruce asked, gripping the Cit's hand.

"Tired," Erl admitted. "Been traveling for two days looking for a safe place for my people to make a stand."

Bruce dropped the Cit's hand. "Have you revolted against us too?"

"We were loyal," Erl said, "until your discs raided our village and killed most of our families. You have seen the wreckage?" Bruce nodded. "We came in from the fields then and made weapons to march against the Overlords. . . . And ran into the barrage of

diz rays before we could tell them that we too were Cits."

"There will be nothing left of America," Bruce told him, "unless their devastation is arrested. They are destroying everything in their path."

"Grain does not grow on bare rock." Erl waved his hand about them. "We have the soil—they have what lay beneath it."

"What is it like, the country to the east?" demanded Bruce.

"For many miles there are steep slopes and level strips of ground. There are several villages of Cits left intact, rayed out of Earth by the diz tunnelers, and several groups of Overlords and their families."

"But why," Bruce was puzzled, "did you return to my estate? You knew your village was destroyed."

"I am looking for a place to make a stand," Erl told him. "Perhaps a hundred of us, Cits and Overlords alike, have escaped from the power of Super Thorm Kendell."

"We have no Super named Kendell in this district," Bruce objected.

"He calls himself Super, however, and has armed men to uphold his claim." Erl fingered a half-healed weal across his jaw. "He uses the lash and the chopping block. Evil as was the rule of the Overlords, save a few like yourself, Alan, we lived in complete freedom compared with Super Kendell's new kingdom."

"Surely he does not raise his hand against the Misterns and their families?" cried Isyl.

"Why do you think there are Overlords following me?" laughed Erl harshly. "Kendell tried to take their wealth and weapons for his own and those who were not too great weaklings fought back. We joined forces with them, nor were they too proud to refuse our aid, and we retreated in this direction looking for a safe place to make our final stand."

"This is it, Alan! This narrow tongue of land I crossed from the eastern lands is the only link connecting your estate and the land beyond with Kendell's. A handful of men can here hold back an army."

"Are you with us?"

Bruce grinned. "I know you are telling the truth, old friend. Go to your comrades and tell them we welcome them to Bruce Acres."

For ten days the fugitive Cits and Overlords came straggling

into the series of stone walls and forts that were rising upon the surface of the narrow ledge of rock that linked the mountain peaks of the east with Bruce Acres. There were more than a hundred of them now. Super Thorm Kendell had attacked other villages as he marched on the trail of his fleeing subjects, and these homeless ones swelled the defending army. Mingled with the motley array of Cits and ordinary Mistfers from the Overlord's lower ranks were Managers, Efficoes, Personnels, and Engineers—highest of the high in the top-heavy ranks of American aristocracy, their titles drawn from the ancient democratic organization of Twentieth Century factories.

Bruce and his Cit friend, Erl Stanley, were everywhere. They checked the growing progress of the walls behind which they were to battle with the men of Kendell, and they rode on half-tamed horses of the Cits far to the west across upended slopes of dirt and matted forest in search of more food and shelter. And they found yet other Cit villages, many of them empty of life, and finally a place where three disc flyers of the Overlords had been overtaken on the ground by the relentless flood of the diz rays.

"Here are all the parts we need," Erl said.

"What do you mean?" his comrade wanted to know. "The ships are useless. There is no longer any power being broadcast to them."

Erl laughed. "We Cits know better than that," he told Bruce. "We have maintained the power plants and factories of the North American Empire for many years. We can build generators and broadcasters from these parts and power them with the magic of falling water."

"My domestics could fight for us then!" Bruce said. "I have twenty or thirty of them."

"That would be a help." The Cit's face twisted into a grimace of distaste at the thought of robots. Robots were a symbol of the Overlords' power to the humble Cits.

"We must strip the machines of all weapons and machinery," decided Bruce. "You had best find a Cit skilled in this work among your men to supervise the work."

"Sure," Erl agreed, a secret smile lurking far back in his eyes. "I was just wondering why all this work of preparing the defenses is thrown upon us. There are a half-dozen Overlords who outrank you."

"Stuffed windbags you mean!" growled Bruce. "We would all

be dead and rotting in the sun before they could decide anything. Someone has to take charge."

"And we're it. A minor Mister and an ignorant Cit." Erl laughed. "Hereditary titles don't carry ability with them do they?"

Bruce's face darkened and he scowled at his friend. "Still harping on that idea of yours that all men should be equal!" He took a deep breath and looked away across the ragged terrain that was their meager new world. "I'll grant there are exceptions. You should have been born a Mister, Erl. You are intelligent. You can read."

"You know why," the Cit said slowly. "I can read and talk fairly well because you taught me how when we were boys. There are many Cits who would have learned much better and quicker."

"This talk wins no war," said Bruce impatiently. "Let's get to work again."

But the generators were not finished when the armed men of the self-proclaimed Super came marching up to the first line of defense that was flung up across the thirty-foot width of slippery stone and mud bridging the emptiness.

For a thousand feet the bridge of rock extended, its width varying but slightly in the central portion where it widened into a fifty-foot table of stone set several feet above the rocky ledge's level. And at intervals of a hundred feet or less barricades of earth and stone were placed across the way.

"Alan," Isyl told her husband, "I am afraid for us all. There are robots marching with his men."

"You are right," Bruce said. He lifted the binoculars, from his trophy room he had salvaged them along with ancient shotguns and clumsy rifles of another century, and examined the stocky manlike shapes. "They carry heavy packs upon their backs. Laden with explosives and supplies, I presume."

Erl asked for the glasses and peered for a brief moment at the knot of mechanical servants marching toward them. He returned the binoculars to Bruce.

"Those packs contain batteries," he said. "Kendell has forced some of the Cits to equip the domestics with power packs. They will be invulnerable to our bullets."

"Only a heavy caliber gun can destroy them," Bruce agreed, "and all of ours from the disc ships are powered with broadcast electricity. If we had only thought of power packs!"

"Don't forget," Erl said, "that batteries run dry in time. Those robots must be almost drained of power marching this far. If we can complete the broadcasters before they reach us we can easily destroy them all."

"Can't we change one or two of the guns over to battery power, Erl? We would not be so helpless then."

"Half a day's work to change them, maybe longer. No use trying. I'm going along to see how Gorud Fetrow is coming with the generator. Keep close to the robot controls. We may have power for you in a matter of minutes."

"Hope you're right. Better make it seconds, instead of minutes. They're ripping through the first barricade."

The defenders, Cits and Mistrs alike, emptied their weapons at the relentlessly advancing domestics and one of them, crippled by some lucky shot, went reeling drunkenly over the edge of the cliff to the rocks hundreds of feet below. But the robots came on, a score of them, their powerful steel limbs ripping the barricade apart, and the men fell back before them to the next prepared position.

Behind the wall of shuffling robots the motley band of armed men recruited by Thorm Kendell followed. These were targets that could be harmed and the bullets of the rebels found three bodies before they found shelter.

Isyl shuddered. "They are evil men. Their faces are cruel. From such as these we can expect no mercy."

Bruce laughed and his arm drew her close for a hasty kiss. "We will ask for no mercy," he told her, "for we will win. See, we will hold the second wall."

The words died on his lips. The robots clawed the heaped-up rocks aside as though they were pebbles and climbed over them. A bearded Cit, slow to hear the command to fall back, shrieked briefly as a great mechanical hand snapped the head from his body. Another man, a Mister perhaps although his garments were ragged as any Cit's, emptied his clumsy old shotgun into those grim ranks and raced toward them with only his empty gun as a weapon.

Isyl shut her eyes. This was the end for the gallant defenders. Bruce was issuing orders that the women and children be taken back into the tangled forest of uprooted trees to hide.

Bruce told her to go with the women and ran to join his men. He raced along the narrow ridge of rock to the central raised platform where their most complete defenses were built. . . . Even

robots could not claw their way through solid rock! And heavy rocks dropped from above could brush them from their footholds as they climbed.

The robots marched forward. Wall after wall fell to them until they were advancing toward the natural raised fort.

A stocky man, resplendent in the armored trappings of a Super, marched behind an armored shield carried by four ragged Cits. Thorm Kendell! Bruce felt a wave of hatred burn through his body. And Isyl looked about for some weapon that she could use to shoot at him but there were none—their meager store of weapons had equipped but half the men. She saw the useless gun, deserted now by the men assigned to it, and went over to it.

Kendell was issuing orders. Bruce saw one of the enemy hurl a dull black stick toward the barrier and, with a catch in his throat, knew it to be a paralysis bomb. The bomb fell short. His hands unclenched and he saw blood in his palms. Half a dozen more bombs hurled ahead and one of them found its mark. Bruce saw the men crumple suddenly behind the barrier and the robots go swarming up the undefended wall. And above them Isyl swung the lifeless gun about until it centered on the shield of Thorm Kendell and twisted the dials that controlled the delicate electrical range-spotters. Her eyes widened as she saw the needles respond and the gun quiver into an uncanny pseudo-life.

She pressed the firing controls as the gun centered full upon the shield of the self-proclaimed Super. The gun crashed once and the shield went spinning. Kendell grovelled on the ground. She swung the heavy gun up toward the rim of the wall even as the first two robots came into sight. Hairlines intersected and the computers blazed their message to her unskilled eyes. She tripped the firing controls and held them.

The robots were gone and part of the wall with them. The men of Kendell went racing back the way they had come. They had little stomach for facing the fire of a heavy caliber gun. Kendell screamed at them to wait as his thick legs carried him after them. And the robots, without a guiding voice to direct them, milled uncertainly about.

"Almost too late!" gasped Bruce, as he flung himself down at Isyl's side and spoke into the domestic audio strapped upon his chest.

Isyl nodded. Bruce took over the gun and sent a barrage of

shells among the fleeing warriors, all the time giving commands to the domestics as they went lumbering away across the rocky bridge.

Through the paralyzed knot of them, most of them beginning to move about again, the domestics waddled mechanically and dropped over the wall upon the enemy robots. The mopping-up did not take long for the battery-powered robots were no match for Bruce's domestics, and then the robots raced on the trail of the humans. The first man to fall was an armored man, a short man who had hung behind to direct the fighting of his mechanical warriors, and with his death Bruce recalled the robots.

"I never thought I would be grateful for the invention of robots," said Bruce ruefully, "but I am today. A good many Cits and Overlords would have died attempting to destroy Kendell."

"There can be peace now upon this world, Alan; Cit and Mister alike can live and work together." Isyl waved her hand at Erl as he limped painfully toward them. "I have seen, and the other Misters have seen, that a Cit can be wiser than themselves. After today we will all be Cits, working together for the good of all!"

Bruce grinned. "Every man a Mister sounds better to me," he said.

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